JOHN MILTON

☆ L'Allegro
☆ IL'Penseroso
☆ Comus
☆ Lycidas

by

H. NEWMAN, M.A.

Price

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TEXTS WITH COMPREHENSIVE CRITICAL INTRODUCTIONS, PARAPHRASES, MEANINGS AND EXPLANATIONS

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NOORSONS
LAHORE — PESHAWAR
17 Urdu Bazar Qissa Khani

Published by
NOORSONS
17, Urdu Bazar, Lahore
Qissa Khani, Peshawar

Printed at
Zarreen Art Press
61, Railway Road, Lahore
Phone : 66274

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MILTON'S

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Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour ;
England hath need of thee : she is a fen
Of stagnant waters : altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men ;
Oh ! raise us up, return to us again ;
And give us manners, freedom, virtue, power,
Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart ;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea ;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself didst lay.

—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER I

LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN MILTON

Introduction

Milton's work is influenced by his personality, and by his interests : There are cases in which the life and career of a writer are of comparatively little importance, and his works are of the first importance. The great example is Shakespeare, for it does not matter what may be the truth of the numberous conjectures about events of Shakespeare's life. His works are not affected thereby, and the greatness of Shakespeare does not depend on his relation to the Elizabethan Age, but is for the people of all ages and times. The reader of *Macbeth* can enjoy and understand the play although he knows little of the facts concerning Shakespeare's life. This does not apply to Milton. Though *Paradise Lost* is of enduring literary value, yet it is so influenced by the personality of Milton, and by the currents of religious and political strife in the first half of English Seventeenth Century History, that it is necessary to know something about the man himself and the conditions under which he lived. In this connection, Coleridge said : "Shakespeare's poetry is characterless ; that is, it does not reflect the indiyidual Shakespeare but John Milton himself is in every line of the *Paradise Lost*. In the *Paradise Lost*—indeed in every one of his poems—it is Milton himself whom you see ; his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael, almost his Eve—are all John Milton ; and it is a sense of this intense egotism that gives me the greatest pleasure in reading Milton's works. The egotism of such a man is a revelation of spirit." While Professor Saintsbury says : "We are likely to misread not a little of the work, if we do not know the life."

Early education : Milton was born in 1608 in the city of London, where his father had been a scrivener, that is, a lawyer of unimportant standing. Milton's father appears to have been highly educated, as well as successful in business. He was a lover of music, and this love was inherited by his son. Young Milton was sent at an early age to St. Paul's School, which is still a flourishing institution in London. He had also a private tutor, named Thomas Young, and his early education seems to have partaken of the forcing process which many educationists have decried in the present day. In later years, Milton tells us that, when he was twelve years old, it was not an unusual thing for him to sit up studying till the early hours of the morning.

Milton at Cambridge : his unusual personality : Milton was admitted to Cambridge University in his seventeenth year, and it is from this period that the unusual and isolated nature of Milton's personality begins to manifest itself. He does not seem to have got on well with his tutor, and was "sent down" for a short period by the University authorities, for some minor offence against the rules. Milton himself admits that he did not yield unquestioning obedience, and grumbles that he was not allowed to choose his own studies. The nickname of "the lady of Christ's," (*i.e.*, of Christ's College) was bestowed on him by his fellow students, and this was probably given because of his well-known physical beauty and grace of manner, and possibly also because of the fact that he had no interests in the drinking parties and rougher amusements of the undergraduates. The main facts which emerge are that he was studious, reserved, and of an uncommon disposition which required tactful handling on the part of his teachers. These qualities were to accompany him through all his life.

Post-graduate study : Milton had been intended by his father for the career of a priest. But his first tutor, Young, had been a strict Presbyterian, and the tutors at Cambridge, with whom Milton had been unfriendly, had been "Laudians", *i.e.*, advanced members of the Anglican Church. So Milton gradually became an extreme supporter of that religious body which was known as the Puritans, and so was

allowed to withdraw from training for the church. His father did not attempt to argue him out of this decision, and, since the elder Milton was in comfortable circumstances, John settled down at home for five years after leaving Cambridge, giving up his time to the advanced study of languages, classics and history. This part of his life was spent in the pretty district of Horton, in Buckinghamshire, just about twenty miles out of London. Milton had gained his B.A. degree before leaving Cambridge, but there is no doubt that the wealth of learning, which ultimately characterised all his works, was acquired to a great extent during these five years. It was in this period that Milton first turned his attention to poetry. *Comus* and *Lycidas* certainly were written at Horton, as well as sundry minor poems. In 1635 the University conferred the degree of M.A. upon him. From the time of his first entry into Cambridge till the end of his five years at Horton, Milton had twelve years of intense study, and this was all towards the one end of literature which he had realised was to be his great gift.

Effects of solitary study on Milton's work and nature : It is certain, from many passages in his works, as well as in private letters, that Milton deliberately regarded these twelve years as a training period for a career in poetry. In regard to this period, Professor Saintsbury said : "In a sense, nothing could be more fortunate. Solitude, and the power of working as one pleases and when one pleases only are among the greatest of intellectual luxuries ; they are perhaps more than luxuries—positive necessities to exceptional poetic temperaments. The moral effects of both may be more disputable. It certainly did not, in Milton's case, lead to dissipation......it may have fostered the peculiar arrogance......the morose determination to be different, the singular want of adaptability in politics and social matters generally, which have been admitted, even by sympathisers with his political and religious views."

Milton's Italian tour : To complete this very thorough home education, the elder Milton now sent his son for a prolonged tour on the Continent of Europe. He visited

Paris, and then spent some time in the loveliest and most romantic spots in Italy. While at Florence, he met with the celebrated scientist and astronomer, Galileo, who is the 'Tuscan artist,' mentioned in line 288 of the First Book of *Paradise Lost*. He arrived back in England in 1639, being then thirty-one years of age, and we might mark this date as the completion of Milton's training period, though the education of a poet is never completed.

Milton, the school-master : The first step which Milton took on his return home, was to receive as pupils his two nephews as well as some other boys. He seems to have taken very seriously to this work, and even published a work on education under the title *Of Education ; to Master Samuel Hartlib*. As a schoolmaster, Milton is said to have attempted to make his pupils work as hard, and for as long hours, as he himself had found possible, with results which would not have been approved of by any of our modern educational experts. Had England been in a peaceful and settled condition, it is quite possible that school-mastering might have remained his profession. In *Woodstock*, Sir Walter Scott makes one of Milton's Cavalier opponents speak of him contemptuously as "that school-master of little boys".

Formation of the Puritans in the church and Milton, a controversial writer in politics and religion : But the realm of England was rent by divisions in church and politics. Since the Reformation of Henry VIII, two great schools of religious thought had sprung up in England. First of all, England had broken away from the Church of Rome, and established the Anglican Church. This Church differed from the Catholics only in rejecting the authority of the Pope; the doctrine and dogma remained unaltered. But the time came when many men were dissatisfied with the amount of ritual and elaborate ceremonies which still remained in this Anglican Church. They held that God should be worshipped more simply, and disagreed with the painted widows, burning of incense, prayers chanted by priests, and other outward observances of church worship. They held that men needed a purer form of religion, and so they became known as the *Puritans*. They carried things to the opposite extreme, for they

made their worship absolutely plain, without any ceremonies whatever, retaining only the strict and primitive teachings of the Old Testament of the Bible. The Puritans became very severe; they looked on even the simplest pleasures and pastimes as very wicked. The king and court supported the Anglican Church, represented by the bishops. When the great Civil War commenced in England, it was possible to call it a religious war. On the one side, supporting the king, were the bishops and noblemen of the state, who were all members of the Anglican Church. On the other side were the Puritans who supported the Parliament in the efforts which were made to curtail the growing and tyrannical rule of the Stuart kings. The feeling was very bitter between the two parties, and Milton became a strong and active supporter of the Puritans and the Parliament. For some twenty years, Milton was engaged in writing pamphlets and other works of a controversial nature, in which he championed the cause of popular liberty, and condemned the misrule of the king, and the wickedness of the Anglican Church and the Cavalier noblemen. He lets some of this bitterness appear even in *Paradise Lost*, a work which is a national epic should be free from discussion of all controversial matters in politics and church.

Milton as a writer of prose: During the twenty years of Milton's life after his Italian tour, he was engaged busily in writing such work as the pamphlets, defending the liberty of the people. He married Mary Powell, the daughter of a Cavalier gentleman, but their married life was far from happy. Milton had little knowledge of human nature, especially of the feminine part of it. He published certain treatises proving from the Bible that divorce was desirable, and also a work *Areopagitica : A Speech for Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, being the first plea in English Literature for the freedom of the press. In many of his prose works, which were written as counter-arguments to Anglican bishops, Milton showed neither moderation nor good taste. But neither moderation nor good taste was practised by the writers of the time.

Milton becomes blind through overwork: When the party of the Parliament and Puritans had finally defeated

their opponents, and executed King Charles, Milton became Latin Secretary to the new Government, the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. But this time, in 1649, Milton's eyesight commenced to trouble him, and he lost the sight of one eye. He was warned that, if he kept on with his strenuous writing, he would become totally blind. But it was necessary to work, justifying the action of his party in overthrowing the royal power and executing the king, and Milton launched forth into prose with a defence of his party. The result was that he became totally blind in 1652, and his greatest works, including *Paradise Lost*, were composed after this calamity.

Milton an isolated and lonely figure : We know little of Milton's private life during the time of the Commonwealth. He seems to have had practically no friends, for he was separated from the leading men of the Puritans because they were blunt, uneducated men, with no interest in culture and art. He was separated equally far from the educated minds of the Cavalier party, because of his political views. His contribution to poetry, in all this long period, is a series of beautiful sonnets, in which he used the sonnet form for the expression of every conceivable subject under the sun. The sonnet on his blindness is one of the best known, and it has been included in the present volume, for the benefit of the enquiring student who may desire a more personal expression of Milton's mind and thought than is afforded by the poems in the text.

Downfall of Milton's party in the State : In 1660, the Commonwealth came to an end. The Puritans had disgusted the people by their undue sternness, and their intolerance of opposing opinions. The kingship was restored, and the son of the late king ascended the throne. Milton was now in some danger, because of the active part which he had played with his pen opposing the Royalists. For some months he was compelled to lie in hiding in the house of a friend, until an Act of Parliament was passed, proclaiming a general pardon to all who had belonged to the late rulers in the Commonwealth. But some of Milton's books were burnt publicly by the hangman, to indicate the hatred in which his views were held by the party now returned to power, and for

some time he was actually deprived of his liberty. Milton was now reduced to comparative poverty, though it is hardly likely that he was ever in actual want. He married again, and settled down in humbler quarters in London, for his father's house had been destroyed by the Great Fire. It was now that Milton set about the composition of *Paradise Lost*, that great work which he had been contemplating for many years. He says himself of this subject that he had been "long choosing and begun late." The great work was completed in the year 1665, and was followed some time after by *Paradise Regained*.

Milton gained little financial profit from the composition and publication of this famous work. He sold the copyright of it to a London bookseller for £5 in hand, £5 more when 1300 copies had been sold, and a similar sum on the publication of further editions. Milton lived long enough to receive £15, and then his widow sold her rights outright for £8. The *Albion* Editor remarks: "Though Milton gained little pecuniary benefit from his masterpiece it won him golden opinions from the best writers of the age—Dryden, Marvell and Denham. Yet the poem was never thoroughly brought before the public till after the Revolution, when Addison, by his elegant criticism in *The Spectator*, discovered to the nation the treasure so long hidden from them, which they were then far better able to value than in the troubled days when it first issued from the press."

During the last few years of his life Milton wrote no fresh poetry. His last great work was *Samson Agonistes*, in which the theme of a blinded hero was enough to ensure that it would come from his very heart. He had long suffered from gout, and this gradually became worse, and ultimately was the cause of his death, in November, 1674. He was buried beside his father in St. Gile's Church at Cripplegate.

Early lyrics: Milton was a busy writer in his early years and in his period of retirement from active participation in political life. There is a long period in between, during which he wrote little that is of literary value though he was responsible for the production of many controversial tracts

and pamphlets, dealing with matters which were of interest in church and state. The *Nativity Ode*, his earliest work is a beautiful poem dealing with the birth of Christ. The two pieces which follow *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroso* mean, in Italian, "The joyful man" and "The thoughtful man." They are lyrics which deal with the delightful sights and impressions of the English countryside and the impressions which they make on the poet, first in a joyful mood, and again, in a mood of thoughtful melancholy. *Lycidas* is an elegy and one of the most magnificent poems in the English language. It was inspired by the death of a college friend, Edward King, who was drowned at sea, and is written in the form of a pastoral, *i.e.*, Milton imagines himself to be a shepherd, lamenting the death of a brother shepherd. This poem is full of the most beautiful gems of language, allied to the highest poetic art; but it is of interest that, even here, Milton turns aside, as in *Paradise Lost* to deliver a crushing attack against the corrupt clergy of the Anglican Church, *Comus* is a masque, that is, a spectacular play full of pageantry and display, but with little plot. It also excels in high poetical qualities, and is notable as showing the austere and "monkish" nature of Milton already commencing.

The prose works : The list of works with Latin names which follows is chiefly of prose pamphlets, dealing with politics and religion. If we had only Milton's prose works to judge him by, his fame would not be nearly so great. He was not a great prose writer, though numerous fine passages exist in his works. But they are spoiled by the violent and one-sided political spirit which runs throughout, and are typical of the undesirable trend in the literature of the day.

Paradise Regained : *Paradise Lost* was written to show the Fall of Man. *Paradise Regained* is a sequel, to show how the Son of God comes to redeem Man from the consequences of his earlier sin. It is generally regarded as not so fine as *Paradise Lost*, though Coleridge thought it better. *Samson Agonistes* is a drama, written on the purely classical model, and the hero is the Biblical character of Samson, who is made to show much of Milton's own personality and self.

The following is a chronological list of Milton's works: the dates of *L'Allegro*, *Il' Penseroso*, and *DeDoctrina Christiana* are doubtful :

1629. Nativity Ode.

1632-3 L'Allegro and Il' Penseroso.

1633. Arcades.

1634. Comus.

1637. Lycidas.

1641. Of Prelatical Episcopacy.
Reason of Church Government urged against Episcopacy.

1642. An Apology for Smectymunus.

1644. Tractate on Education,
Areopagitica,
The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.

1645. Poems both English and Latin. [The first edition of the minor poems.]
Tetrachordon.
Colasterion.

1649. Eikonoklastes.

1651. Defensio pro Populo Anglicano.

1654. Defensio Secunda.

1655. Prose Defensio contra Morum.

1659. Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes.

1660. Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth.

1667. Paradise Lost (published).

1670. History of Great Britain.

1671. Paradise Regained } (published).
Samson Agonistes }
De Doctrina Christiana.

CHAPTER II

MILTON THE MAN AND HIS AGE

Milton the Man : However, the theme of this chapter has already been discussed yet it seems advisable to discuss Milton the man and his age in detail so as to give a thorough understanding to the reader.

> "Yet in the England that produced and shaped him, he was a misfit. His peculiar and characteristic brand of classicism, romanticism, puritanism, modernism, individualism, Hebraism, Hellenism, Republicanism, egoism. idignation, sensuous aestheticism, and a passion for liberty of speech and thought that had not been so far conceived but by the few, made him an arrogant, self-dedicated solitary, a superb and monstrous alien." —*Rose Macaulay*

Milton's high-strung idealism and austere egoism did not unbend to human nature's daily needs. The monotonous round of tasks he undertook to fulfil his high destiny left no chinks through which the sunshine Spirit of Love and Laughter, of children's mirth and friendly jest might come, 'tripping the light fantastic toe.' The welcome he gave to Euphrosyne, and her train:

> Jest and youthful Jollity,
> Quips, and Cranks and wanton Wiles,
> Nods and becks, and wreathed smiles,
> ....
> Sport that wrinkled care derides,
> And Laughter holding both his sides.

—had no counterpart in his life The imaginative side of his nature uplifted its awful form to the skies, but his ordinary human side, pedagogic and devoid of humour, showed no sunlit glades, purling streams or glancing cascades. Few

were the intimate friends to whom he condescended to unbosom his heart, whose company he sought to double his joys and halve his sorrows, or while away a merry hour. In his life, as in his prose pamphlets, he alternated between the sublime and the ridiculous. The pamphlets show how often Milton could, with an easy transition, play the scolding fishwife. "The soul was like a star and dwelt apart," says Wordsworth of him in one of his noblest lines. But we know that it did not dwell apart—so deeply was it engrossed in scurrilous recrimination and futile polemics. Milton was too sensitive, too passionate, too egoistic to be capable of that exalted self-detachment or superiority to the world, with which Wordsworth credits him.

The most illuminating episode in Milton's life is that of his first marriage. One morning he makes a clandestine expedition to squire Richard Powell's at Shotover, who owes him money. His position as creditor, giving him a vantage, the awkward and shamefaced wooer proposes to a girl, who is but half his age, under the haystack or some such safe covert, marries her incontinently, brings her home,—leaves her to the company of the poses of relatives who have accompanied her, and buries himself in his books and teaching. The relatives returning home after the nuptial merry-making, the poor girl, who is but sixteen and has led care-free life on her native woods and moors, finds herself in the home of a forbidding philosopher, who never sacrificed to the Graces. Three weeks of honeymoon with the solemn poet, immersed in his lucubrations over Plato and 'blind Maeonides',—three whole weeks with him must have dragged on like years. "She found it very solitary," says Aubrey; "no company came to her, often-times heard his nephews beaten, and cry. Thus life was irksome to her." Well might it have been so! How Mary Milton must have moped and sulked, and eaten her heart out, during those cheerless days!—while the husband was waiting anxiously in his study for his intellectual and philosophical wife of sixteen to come in and beg him to discourse to her about Hermes Trismegistus and Euripides! She slips from the house and runs back to her family, with the promise, but not the intention, of returning by Michaelmas. The husband,

in high dudgeon, puts her down as a mindless thing, works himself up to a rage against all women who are sticks-in-the mud, unfit for intellectual camaraderie! "Is there no escape from such soulless unions, which "imbrute" the husband's higher nature? "Well, I will write such a pamphlet on the necessity for divorce as will tear up the existing law which ties up our 'living souls' to mere 'dead bodies'?"—says the irate lord and master of the run-away wife! And he goes it hammer and tongs!

If but a ray of humour had penetrated his crass ignorance of himself and of human nature! The most powerful mental microscope could not have discovered an atom of humour in Milton's composition. Put the picture of the newly-wedded husband, given above, with that of the blind father, asking his daughters to read to him from books in languages whereof they were utterly ignorant. So hard-driven were they that one of them said—on hearing of his third marriage—that "it was no use to hear of his wedding, but if she could hear of his death, it was something." And yet, Milton hardly knew himself for a domestic tyrant!

What is the central, the dominating trait of Milton the man—apart from the sombre shadows that overcast him? It was his *towering egoism*—the ineradicable notion inherent and fostered by early training that he was a genius, infinitely above the ruck of common men,—an Elect of God, set apart to accomplish great things in the realm of art—of spiritual art. There was something sublime in it, something incalculably great. But it had also a baser side, manifesting itself as mere megalomania in the sphere of poetic creation. It was no more than the Puritanical doctrine of Election, receiving special emphasis from his individual nature. "There was", as Dr. Wingfield-Stratford says, "for all its virtues, inherent in Puritanism one dark and besetting sin, that threatened to bring the whole of its work toppling in ruin about its ears. The assurance of salvation which every Puritan desired and which sooner or later most of them attained, brought with it a hard and humourless pride, from which the noblest minds, Milton's, Cromwell's, George Fox's, were

not exempt......It is a fearful thing for a man to place himself on a pedestal above his fellow."

But this pride and egoism of Milton's came to be entwined with sleepless toil to qualify himself for his great mission.

They made him early in life overwork his tired eyes over half a dozen different languages, and over three different subjects. He who would drink of Mimir's spring, says the Norse Myth, must pledge one of his eyes on its bank. Milton pledged both his eyes.

It was not mere scholarship that he aimed at. He resolved to acquire at the threshold of youth – when others only tread the primrose path of dalliance—the moral, spiritual and intellectual qualifications to be a Sacred Poet, a *vates sacer*. The sentence in which he expresses his lofty ideal thrills us like a clarion-call to the higher life : "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem ; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things ; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that is praiseworthy." Such a lofty idealism combined with such divine intensity of purpose the gods might well envy !

Egoism, *idealism*, *colossal industry*, the result of *an intense and steady purposefulness of spirit*,—let these keynotes of Milton's character be present in our minds before we think of them—as we must—in close connection with two other deeply marked traits, to wit, *courage* and *fortitude*. The courage he showed in seeking to realise the causes he held dear—freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of worship, tolerance, rights of the people, as he conceived each of these—was accompanied by a wise caution, the better part of valour. He did not run full tilt against the bull's horns. He always struck when the time came. It is possible

to call this timidity, as Mr. Hilaire Belloc does; and to accuse Milton of following the cult of the jumping cat. For, we cannot aver that Milton fought with a reckless disregard of personal safety. But who could aver, on the other hand, that Milton hurled his bolts against tyrannies of all kinds because he was confident that he would be perfectly safe in doing so ? His caution does not prove his timidity, any more than it proves him to have been insincere. The verdict of posterity that Milton was a fearless champion of liberty still stands—unvitiated by any evidence to the contrary. But we may grant that his courage was not heroic or 'magnificent.'

Consider now the fortitude of the man. In 1660, blind, with old age fast coming upon him, buried under the ruins of the Republican structure he had built his hopes upon, a fugitive in hourly danger of violent death and imprisonment,—his head, though "bloody with the bludgeoning of chance", was still unbowed. Milton's unconquerable will trampled down circumstance, and the moral victory alone would have been sublime. It was a moment in which the stoutest heart might have quailed. An appalling loneliness of spirit might have befallen the bravest in his place. In those dark days—"dark, dark, irrecoverably dark, amidst the blaze of noon"—when he had become, to use his own words again, a "living sepulchre", he launched that mighty fabric, *The Paradise Lost*, which has been happily compared to a mountain range. Nor did he stop with that *tour de force* of imagination and art. He went further and crowned it with the solitary grandeur of *Samson Agonistes.* Before this soaring spirit of man all criticism must stand awed, and hushed in humility. And yet, this very preterhuman fortitude was not without some alloy of a baser metal, namely, Milton's Puritanical feeling that he was the chosen of God—a martyr suffering persecution at the hands of God's enemies", as Mr. Belloc says with a fine justness of perception.

To all students of Milton's life it is now a commonplace that he was not a dyed-in-the-wool Puritan. To the latter all beauty in Nature and art is a veiled temptation of the Devil. Milton had a poet's sensuous feeling for

Beauty. Mr. Belloc describes it in a passage that compels quotation : "......beauty was for him all his life an appetite, an object and a guide. Of all the English poets he is the one for whom sudden beauty in diction seems most inevitable, in whom you never know under what incongruous conditions beauty at white heat will not appear, shining through an immortal line. He knew that he was the vehicle, and after a fashion, the priest of beauty, and he worshipped at that shrine all his life—to our immense advantage."

Of all the arts he loved music most. He inherited the taste from his father, and he grew up in an atmosphere of music. Great music thrilled him to the depths of his being.

Though not exactly of a lovable nature, he was companionable, and genial in converse. An urbane courtesy distinguished him, and occasionally his gravity of face could relax into a smile.

His age : After discussing Milton, the man we turn to his age. Belloc says :

> "These years were critical in the story of England. They form the decisive phase in that complete transformation which turned the English from Catholic to Protestant ; from common obedience under a king to subjection by ranks under a Gentry (with kingship forgotten) ; from a nation of owners to a nation of wage-earners and therefore from a peasantry to a capitalist society.
>
> "In those years first vigorously appear above ground the English colonies, English banking, the expansion of London and the springs of what was to become so mighty an increase in English numbers and power : Modern England. Of such a development Milton was in part a prophet, in part a pioneer, in some degree a creator ; whence his profound historical significance, and the importance, for the understanding of the England coming after him, that we should understand himself."

Watch the clouds massed about the setting sun, of an evening when Nature has picked out one of the finer scenes of enchantment from her infinite repertory. Mountain-peaks, palaces, lakes, lit-up sea, and the ribbed sand of its shore are there in colours that defy our famished labels. They exhibit a wild disharmony, even as they fix our gaze. One who would sketch them as they change from moment to moment, must give us not one, but a series of moving pictures. Think of the cloud-scape in its twofold aspect—the *medley* of colours and the *cinematographic succession* of fading and brightening hues—and you get an image of Milton's Age, the first three quarters of the seventeenth century with its unresolved conflicts and its changing character.

We see Mediaeval scholasticism fighting a losing battle with Modern Science, *then* an infant Hercules lightly strangling serpents in the cradle ; classical scholarship and passion for learning, either quickening hidden springs of poetry or drying up its streams at the source ; poetic imagination seeking new forms of expression,—often disguising itself in the complex involutions of prose ; the forces of the Reformation making gradual headway over Catholicism, until the best part of the population becomes Protestant ; the Englishman's sense of personal rights and liberty of speech struggling against ecclesiastical and political repressions ; the moral laxity of the few in the higher ranks of society deriding the sobriety of the many, only to be put down by the iron rod of Puritanism in power.

The Age was full of contradictions : and most of its contradictions are in its poetic child, Milton. He lived in the heart of London, as a Pilgrim of Time, who had left his home in ancient Athens to sojourn in a Caroline caravanserai. A Greek to the backbone by intellectual training, he was also a nurseling of the English poets. On his way he had become a domicile of Palestine, Rome and Florence, had held long parleys with Virgil, Dante and the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, with Tasso and Aristo. The different strains in Milton's genius—Hellenism, Hebraism, Classicism, Romanticism —are those of his age. He illustrates its growing political consciousness, its individualism and assertion of reason, its

turbulent controversies, and its bid for greater tolerance. He reflects the conflict between Reason and Faith witnessed in the writings of Sir Thomas Browne, Hobbes and Locke. He has in him the curious scholarship of Burton and the encyclopaedic learning of Selden.

The Seventeenth Century was like the Roman God, Jenus, with two faces—the one looking towards the Middle Ages and the other towards our own century. It was Newton, Locke and Hobbes who inspired Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Montesquieu and others who blazed the trail of Reason in France. The intellectual flame of Pre-Revolutionary France was kindled in Seventeenth Century England. The England of Milton's century saw the foundation of the Royal Society for the promotion of "Physico-Mathematico-Experimental" learning ; and the phrase, clumsy as it is, expresses the spirit and method of modern science. There were other stars in the scientific sky, besides Newton, one of them of co-equal magnitude—Leibnitz, Halley, Boyle, and Harvey.

Bacon had significantly heralded the modern age of induction in his *Novum Organum ;* while calculus age of Newton and Leibnitz ushered in not only a new era in Astronomy and Physics, but also the wonders of modern engineering. This modernity of the age is reflected in Milton,—not in his outlook on the Universe which was thoroughly mediaeval, but in his restive spirit of enquiry in the human sphere. Bernard Shaw is not more modern in his views on marriage than Milton was in his attitude to divorce and polygamy. And yet, in Milton, "the divinely appointed" inferiority of women was an article of faith. "Who can be ignorant that woman was created for man and not man for woman?"—he asks like the master of an eastern harem. A strange Mediaevalism (or orientalism) !—which was typical of the age and its greatest poet.

Mediaeval and modern; profligate, sane, and masochistic; authoritarian and libertarian ; lyrical and prosaic—that was the age in whose sky Milton shone like a star and raged like a comet.

It was an age of transition from the Mediaeval to the Modern. Its aspect changed from decade to decade. About 1608—the year of Milton's birth—the heart of England was much nearer the traditions of Catholicism than to the diverse shades of Protestanism. But, as the century advanced, the Protestant leaven spread apace, until, at the end of the century, it became the reigning religion of the nation. The Seventeenth century, as Mr. Belloc remarks, was "a battlefield between the ancient traditions and the new religion." The nation was divided between "those who felt a tenderness or regret for the age-long moral habit of the country, for what had been the immemorial national Catholic religion, and those who rejected and disliked those traditions and that religion."

We speak of Milton as a Puritan. But he was a Puritan "with a difference",—one whose soul thrilled like an Aeolian harp to Beauty and Joy. We speak, too, of the growing Puritanism of his times. But, what exactly do we mean by Puritanism? For it is well that we are precise about the term. The Puritans were those who believed in the Calvinistic doctrines of Election and Predestination, and thought that God was a stern taskmaster and ruthless judge, who condemned sinners to everlasting perdition. They were uncompromisingly opposed to the organization of the English Church under priests and to the entire body of sacraments. When the century was in its teens, and Milton but a child, they were a small, but an extremely effective and dynamic minority. In the forties they became in numbers and influence a redoubtable force in the country, counting among its leaders the lawyers and great landowners and a good many of the yeomen in its rank and file. During the twenty years of the Civil War and Protectorate the Puritans were not merely the protagonists of moral and religious reform, but also formed the spearhead of resistance to the king's flouting of popular rights.

The growing Puritanism was a reaction against the prevailing vice of the day. "Every form of moral earnestness was treated with contempt.. If a country gentleman only discountenanced vice among his neghbours, or protected the oppressed among the Puritans, he was denounced as a Puritan

himself, and scoffed at accordingly." In her *Life of Col. Hutchinson*, Mrs. Hutchinson tells us of the odium and insult that her father's household and those of other loyalists drew upon themselves for not running with the general stream of vice. From the same authority we learn how every stage and every puppet play loved to jeer at the Puritans, and how fiddlers and mimics found it "the most gainful way of fooling" to abuse them. "The result was that many did not claim to be Puritans, but who retained some moral earnestness and decency of life and some remaining sense of self-respect, began to drift the Puritan way."

To gain a fair perspective of the age we must turn it in our minds like a geographical globe, so that the features of its human landscape may be seen in mutual contrast. We have remarked how Vice's stock rose and Virtue's fell in Jacobean and Caroline times. But in those very times it was that freedom of speech and person came to be increasingly guarded by the aegis of the law. "The political and religious tyranny of the monarch," says Professor G. M. Travelyan, "had been effectively curbed. The State Church no longer pretended to be co-extensive with the nation. The individual was protected in freedom of speech and person by Parliament victorious over the Crown and by the Common Lawyers victorious over the Prerogative Courts. Henceforth, so far as the government was concerned, 'a man may speak his mind,' as nowhere else in Europe and as never before in England . . . It may fairly be doubted whether any set of men, since the victors of Marathon and Salamis, had done as much to establish human freedom on a practical basis as the Roundheads and Cavaliers, the Whigs and Tories of the Stuart Parliaments."

But this impetus to human freedom received a temporary check by the spiritual courts instituted by Archbishop Laud. With ill-advised, but well-intentioned, zeal to chasten the morals of his times, he empowered the ecclesiastical courts to summon layment to answer for their sins before the priesthood. Naturally, Puritan, precision and loose-liver, came to loathe these courts. Laud turned the knife in rankling hearts by assiduously employing the censorship of the press,

which was then in episcopal hands, to burke all opposition to his ideas.

The Age of Milton was marked by the prosperity of rural England. The bulk of the nation lived in the village —the rural population being composed largely of small squires, freehold yeomen, leasehold farmers and craftsmen. The yeomen owned the land they tilled and the roofs that housed them. "The yeomen wears russet clothes, but makes golden payment, having tin in his buttons and silver in his pockets . . . . In his own country he is a main man in Juries" —writes Thomas Fuller. The intelligence of yeomen and small farmers was sharpened, and their outlook broadened by the community of trade which brought the village into closer contact. The population of England, which was about five million in the second decade of the century, lived well-spaced out lives, with elbow-room to develop individuality in moral character and craftsmanship. "Men and women were widely scattered through the island, and thrown back upon themselves during the frequent hours of solitude and isolation ; each had space to grow, like the spreading oak tree alone in the field, without troubling too much to conform to any conventional pattern. 'It was every man in his humour.' The typical economic life of the time, as conducted by yeoman, farmer, and small craftsman, left the individual more unfettered and self-dependent than he had been in the corporate life of mediaeval burgher and serf, or has become in our day under great capitalist and labour combination."

But this healthy, enhanced individualism did not touch the lives of women, who continued to live, as in the middle ages, under the tutelage of men. Women of the upper and middle classes had to look upon their husbands,—who had been chosen, not *by*, not *for* them,—as lords to whom an unquestioning obedience was due. The bearing of this fact on Milton's attitude to his first wife and his view of womanhood is too obvious to need special comment.

Milton's powerful championship of the political and religious revolution, and freedom of the press, his patriotism and keen political consciousness are better understood in

the light of his environments. He was a Londoner to the backbone. Mark its significance. The money power of London was pledged to the hilt in favour of the political and religious revolution. While, in Milton's childhood, it held one-fifteenth of the total population of England, it had, in the seventies, 'grown to be one-tenth of the whole kingdom.' With a volume of trade three times that of all the other ports taken together, it became a humming emporium, no less for ideas, than for instruments of credit that ultimately crystallized in the foundation of the Bank of England. It admitted continental ideas without embargo, and assimilated them judiciously. It received the *premeur* of foreign news, was more familiar than the rest of the country with foreign customs and manners; more jealous of foreign influences, and hence more 'aggressively national in feeling,' without being traditional. And Milton was a child of London.

CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTIC OF MILTON'S POETRY

The following are the main characteristics of Milton's poetry :—

1. Sublimity : The supreme quality of Milton's poetry is sublimity. His poetry elevates and uplifts us. Milton lived a life of purity and austerity, and his poetry bears the unmistakable stamp of the nobility of his character. All that comes out of his pen is characterized by dignity and stateliness. His poetry exercises an elevating influence on the mind of the reader. He gives us an impression of moral exaltation.

Milton's subject matter is sublime. Voltaire is of the opinion that Milton's poetry was the grandest thing in English literature. Milton could never come down to the cheap love poetry which had been in vogue during his times. Not lover and lasses, but God, Satan, Adam, Eve and Christ are the characters that Milton introduces in his poetry. In the *Nativity Ode*, the subject is Christ, who brought about religious regeneration in Europe. The songs of the angels are heard in this Ode. The poet presents the setting of stars and oceans by God at the beginning of the creation and trumpet of dooms day, when the dead shall rise from the graves. In *Comus* Milton presents sublime thoughts concerning virtue. *Paradise Regain* is an expression of the sublime thoughts and ideas that Milton had about God and religion. To Wordsworth sublimity of Milton was something connected with his character and he invoked the sublime influence of Milton to wipe away the selfishness and materialism of his time.

2. Sense of Beauty : The chief characteristic of Milton's poetry is his profound love of beauty in its various

forms. He is deeply sensitive to the beauty of the external nature. He depicts the beauty of the country side in *L'Allegro.* The poet watches the beauty of the sun, the clouds, the russet lawns and the trees standing in their beauty and grandeur. In *Il'Penseroso* he presents many exquisite landscaps of beauty for our delight :

> To behold the wandering noon
> Riding near her highest moon,
> Like one that had been led astray
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
> And oft, as if her head she bow'd ;
> Stooping through a fleecy cloud

In *Paradise Lost* his sense of beauty is supreme. In Book IV he gives a glowing description of the beauty of Adam and Eve.

In a letter, dated 23rd September 1637, Milton wrote to his friend Diodati expressing his love for beauty in all that he composed in his life. "Whatever the deity may have bestowed upon me in other respects, He has certainly inspired me, if any ever were inspired, with a passion for the good and the beautiful. Nor did Ceres, according to the fable, ever seek her daughter Proserpine with such unceasing solitude as I have sought this idea of the beautiful in all the forms and appearances of things, for many are the shapes of things divine," Keats could not have expressed his love of the beautiful in a more passionate language.

3. **Stateliness of Manner :** With this sense of beauty is combined a stateliness of manner which gives a high dignity to Milton's poetry. Majesty is the quality that Milton gives to English poetry. English poetry between the time of Shakespeare and Milton had many qualities and graces, but the quality of stateliness is imparted to it by the poetry of Milton. The poet never stoops down at any stage nor does he agree to be on a lower plane just to justify the tastes of the lower public. Milton is always stately, majestic and grand. The subjects that he chooses for his composition are stately and the treatment that he gives to them is equally

in conformity with the subject matter. Common objects do not form the subject matter of his poetry. As he himself 'dwelt apart,' so his themes are far removed from the trivialities of life. His problems are of eternal interest and his genius can find full scope in dealing with grand themes; the problems of man, the redemption of humanity by Christ, and the ways of God to man.

4. His High Seriousness : Matthew Arnold considered high seriousness as a characteristic of good and great poetry. High seriousness marks both Milton's character and poetry. He is serious through and through. Even there is lack of humour in his writings. Walter Raleigh beautifully says, "Almost all men are less humorous than Shakespeare, but most men are more humorous than Milton." The poet never bothers about a big audience of admiring readers. His desire is to have "fit audience though few" an audience that may be able to appreciate the high seriousness of his poetic thought.

5. A Great Poetic Artist : The high seriousness of Milton's poetry goes well with his profession as a poet. He is convinced that the vocation of the poet is lofty and exalted, and to keep upto that vocation, be writes poetry of great sublimity and beauty. The artistic workmanship of the poet comes out everywhere. He writes as a conscientions artist and whatever has been left behind is a hall-mark of artistic perfection. "Poetry has been by far our greatest artistic achievement, and Milton is by far the greatest poetic artist. To live with Milton is necessarily to learn that the art of poetry is no triviality, no mere amusement, but a high and grave thing, a thing of the choicest discipline of phrase, the first craftsmanship of structure, the most nobly ordered music of sound".

6. His Superb Imagination : Milton's imagination is superb. Only a man of Milton's imagination could have shaped the *Paradise Lost*. The theme of the epic is vast and of a more universal human-interest than any handled by Milton's predecessor. The imagination of the poet creates a world of heaven and hell which could only have been possible

with the superb imagination that he has. He has an imagination that can soar above time and space and be at home in infinity.

Lowell rightly says : In reading *Paradise Lost* one has a feeling of vastness. You float under an illimitable sky brimmed with sunshine or hung with constellation ; the abysses of space are about you ; you hear the condensed surges of an unseen ocean ; thunders mutter round the horizon ; and if the scene changes, it is with an elemental movement like the shifting of imagination with an impalpable hint rather than by concentrating them upon too precise particulars."

7. **His Suggestive Power** : The most striking characteristic of Milton's poetry is his suggestive power. The effect of his poetry is produced not by what it expresses, but by what it suggests. The imagination of the poet conjures many beautiful and suggestive pictures. In Milton's poetry more is meant than what meets the ear.

8. **Autobiographical elements in Milton's Poetry** : Milton's poetry is intensely autobiographical. It is, in fact, the version and mirror of his own life. In this respect he stands contrasted with Shakespeare whose objectivity is well marked in all his plays, Shakespeare's impersonal nature is deeply embossed in all his works. It is very difficult to say where Shakespeare is to be seen among his characters, but Miltion can be seen and felt in almost all that he produced. Let us survey Milton's poems in order to illustrate the autobiographical note of his poetry. His early poems are reflection of his own personality. *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso* are presentations of Milton in happy and melancholy mood. In *L'Allegro* Milton presents himself as a lover of the pleasures and joys of the country-side. In *Il'Penseroso* he is a thoughtful student devoted to the study of Greek tragedy and philosophy. In *Comus*, Milton is present in the form of the heroine. The temptations that assail the Lady, also come in the way of Milton and he succeeds like the lady in overcoming them. In *Lycidas*, the poet thinks more of himself than his dead friend. The poet is reminded of his own fate while writing the elegy on Edward King:

Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,
So many some gentle Muse,
With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,
And as he passes turn.
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

Similarly the treatment of the great epic *Paradise Lost* is also highly personal. Here comes before us Milton, the hater of women, the critic of the autocratic government and the lover of liberty. The character of Milton is represented in same aspects through the character of Satan. His spirit of rebellion against constituted authority and his love for liberty are put forth in the mouth of Satan, who, incongruous though it may appear, reflects a great deal of the poet's ideal and aspirations. In this respect an eminent critic has very aptly pointed out: "It is in the passages where Satan speaks of the joy of Independence, and of the hatred which he bears to the tyranny of Heaven's Ruler, that he reaches the most commanding heights of noble eloquence. The reason for this is obvious, for Milton was a great champion of popular liberty in his own day; and gave up the best years of his life, as well as his eyesight, to the cause of England's fight against oppression. Hence Milton cannot help imputing to Satan some of his own sentiments, and putting him in the position of the champion of liberty against autocratic rule."

Milton's puritanical attitude towards women find expression in *Paradise Lost*. Adam is Milton's spokesman when he moralises on the unhappiness of marriage. His out burst is:

Who! Why did God
Creator wise that peopled highest heaven
With Spirits masculine, create at last
This novelty, on earth, this fair defect
Of Nature, and not fill the world at once
With men as Angels, without feminine,
Or find some other way to generate
Mankind? This mischief had not then befallen,
And more that shall befall; innumerable
Disturbances on Earth through female snares
And strait conjunction with this sex.

The study of the epic convinces the reader that the poet's personality, character and belief are present every where in the poem. Regarding the personal nature of Milton's poem, Coleridge wisely observes: "Shakespeare's poetry is characterless; that is, it does not reflect the individual Shakespeare, but John Milton himself is in every line of *Paradise Lost*. In the *Paradise Lost*—indeed in every one of his poems—it is Milton himself whom you see; his Satan, his Adam, his Raphel, almost his Eve—all are John Milton; and it is sense of this intense egotism that gives me the greatest pleasure in reading Miltoñ's works. The egotism of such a man is revlation of spirit."

In *Paradise Regained*, Milton presents himself as a puritan believing in the greatness of religion and the triumph of morality over the tricksy stratagem of Satan. Milton's early life and his devotion to the law of God is present in the First Book of *Paradise Regained* in the following words:

When I was yet a child, no childish play
To me was pleasing, all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be public good; myself I thought
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
All righteous things: therefore above my years,
The law of God I read and found it sweet,
Made it my whole delight and in it grew
To such perfection.

In *Samson Agonists*, Milton puts himself in the figure of Samson. It is an autobiographical fragment and gives an insight into the life and mind of Milton. It is also highly personal and passionate poem. In this play the similarity between Samson and Milton is so well-marked that there is not least difficulty in identifying Milton with Samson. Samson is a blinded hero in the hands of his Philistine enemies; so is Milton. The agonized cry of Samson:

"Oh, dark, dark, dark amid the blaze of noon,"

and the despairing moan of

"All otherwise to my thought pretend,"

is the cry of Milton himself.

9. Milton's Puritanism : In Milton, the note of puritanism and morality is first sounded in *Comus*. It is in this Mosque that Milton presents his puritanic leaving towards high morality and the triumph of virtue. His early poems as *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroso* are not steeped in puritanism, but in *Comus* the note of morality comes out prominently. The following lines from *Comus* represent Milton's love for virtue and his puritanic faith in the triumph of virtue:

> Virtue could see to what virtue would
> By her own radiant light: though Sun and Moon
> Were in the flat Sea sunk.
>
> Mortals that would follow me,
> Love virtue, she alone is free,
> She can teach ye how to clime
> Higher than the Spheary chime
> Or if virtue feeble were,
> Heav'n itself would stoop to her.
>
> But evil on itself shall back recoil,
> And mixed no more with goodness, when at last
> Gather'd like scum, and settl'd itself
> It shall be eternal restless change
> Self-fed, and self-consumed, if this fail
> The pillar'd firmament is rottonness,
> And earth's base built on stubble.

In *Lycidas*, Milton's puritanism comes out in the thundering denunciation of St. Peter against the corrupt clergymen of his times. The following passage from *Lycidas* represents Milton's puritanism at its first:

> Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
> A sheep-hook, or have learn'd out else the least
> That to the faithful Herdman's art belongs!
> What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
> And when they list, their lean and flashly songs
> Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw

The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swolen with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagian spread.

(*See also the preceding chapter*).

10. Milton's Classicism: For classicism *See also Chapter No. III.*

11. Milton's Versification: Milton employed rhymed verse for his early poems *Ode to the Mourning of Christ Nativity*, *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroso*. These poems reveal his superb handling of rhymed verse. But soon he discarded rhyme in favour of blank verse. He was the first-poet who adopted blank verse in non-dramatic poetry and gave it the stamp of perfection. Milton's blank verse has been highly appreciated by many poets. Tennyson paid the following glowing tribute to Milton's blank verse in his sonnet called Milton :

Our mighty mouth'd inventor of harmonies
O skilled to sing of Time or Eternity,
God gifted organ-voice of England,
Milton ; a name to resound for ages.

Landor is of the opinion that Milton blank verse is "the noblest specimen in the world of eloquence, harmony and genius. Arnold thinks that his blank verse is the "sure and the flawless perfection of rhythm and diction."

The following are the chief characteristics of Milton's blank verse:

(*a*) *Overflow of sense*: Milton rejoiced in the 'overflow' of sense from line to line. This is a practice which Marlowe had already imparted to the blank verse and Milton carries it further with efficiency and ease. His sense does not finish at the end of one line. It flows from one line to another till a whole picture is built before us.

(*b*) *Correspondence of rhythm and movement of the line with the sense*: Milton shows also full command over the selection of words which have relation to the sense, and by

doing so he ensures that the rythmic movement of the line will correspond to the sense. When Milton describes the manner in which Satan is overpowered by emotion and finds difficulty in controlling his voice sufficiently to address his fellow angels, he expresses his feelings in the line :

"Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth at last".

(c) *Music of blank verse* : Milton's blank verse is highly musical. Dr. Johnson could not find any music in Milton's blank verse which he considered to be harsh and unequal. William Hazlitt has refuted the charge of Dr. Johnson and has admired the note of music found in Milton's blank verse. He remarks, "Milton blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakespeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had moddled his ideas of versification on the regular sing song of Pope condemns the *Paradise Lost* as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case ; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all other writers, put together. Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza-writers as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there anything like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of the musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiments almost of every image. They rise to fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require."

Milton is the greatest artist and the architect in blank verse the grandeur of his versification—its richness, melody and rhythmical flow—cannot fail to strike even an ordinary reader. In richness and variety of versification, his blank verse stands unrivalled. Raleigh says : "He left a high road behind him, along which many a tuneful piper has since limped, but before him he found nothing but the

jungle and the false fires." An American critic observes: Milton is a consumate master of English blank verse—gifted in its varied movement and the placing of pauses, majestic in its flowing cadence, stern in its beauty, lofty in tone, incomparable in its dignity."

Style and Diction of Milton : Milton's style has been called "grand style," because it has always an unmistakable stamp of majesty in it. His diction is grand and majestic and the language that he employs is the language of a special art. He borrows words from Latin and employs them in his language. With Latin words there goes his classical diction. The Miltonic diction follows the ancient models. Similes and metaphors abound ; with the result that the impression that is left on our minds after reading his poetry is that of grandeur, majesty and dignity.

Matthew Arnold is of the view that, "In the sure and flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction, he is as admirable as Virgil or Dante, and in this respect he is unique amongst us. None else in English literature possesses the like distinction."

"The style of Milton is the natural expression of a soul exquisitely nourished upon the best thoughts and finest words of all ages. It is the language of one who lives in the companionship of the great and the wise of the past time. It is therefore inevitable that the melodies of his rhythm, the grace of his allusive touch should escape the common ear."

13. Conclusion : Variety, flexibility, lyric passion, these are the qualities for which we may search Milton in vain ; and in these matters Shakespeare is supremely great. But in loftiness of thought, splendid dignity of expression, and rhythmic felicities, Milton has few peers, no superior. Wordsworth owed much, Landor and Tennyson something to his prosodic genius. The matter of his work is necessarily limited in its interest and significance, but there has been no finer exponent of the "grand manner" and it is impossible to exaggerate the influence of his wonderful diction upon the history of poetry from his own day down to the day of William Waston.

CHAPTER IV

MILTON'S POETRY AS A FUSION OF THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION ELEMENTS

OR

THE HELLENIC AND HEBRAIC ELEMENTS IN MILTONS' POETRY

The writers of the seventeenth century generally worked under the influence of the Renaissance and the Reformation, and Milton was no exception. In Milton's poetry there is a nice fusion of the elements upheld by the Renaissance and the Reformation. "Milton's poetry was the last great expression of two enthusiasms, which had passed away even while he wrote the artistic enthusiasm of the Renaissance and the spiritual enthusiasm of the Reformation. No poet realised so completely the Renaissance ideal of poetry cast in classical moulds—carried out so entirely and majestically the programme of the Pleiad. Tasso's poem had been a compromise between classical forms in the drama appear pedantic and boyish beside Milton's Milton, and Milton's only, succeeded in producing living and beautiful poems in correct classical forms. And into these classical forms he poured the intensest spirit of the Protestant movement.

The Renaissance was distinguished by awakened interest in the old writings of the Greeks and the Romans and the ancient classics. The scholars of the Renaissance period intended to infuse into English the beauties of Greek and Roman literature. The poets and scholars working under the influence of the Renaissance adored beauty, romance, and plastic arts. Love for beauty, music and art became the governing passions of writers nurtured

in the soil of the Renaissance. The spirit of the Renaissance may be identified with Humanism—viz "a deep respect for human nature in all its fullness therefore including all our natural desires and instincts". The Renaissance stands for a broader outlook on life and a refined and cultured attitude towards the sunny and jovial aspects of life. It is identified with Helleism, and is another name for the glorification of beauty, music, art, love and exuberance of life.

The Reformation was a religious movement and aimed at the cultivation of religious, moral and austerity and other wordly outlooks. The writers working under the influence of the Reformation championed theological dogmas rather than humanistic culture. They aimed at self purification rather than the cultivation of art or music. They were opposed to all kinds of gay frivolities and artistic pursuits. They were puritans to whom religion and morality were the preeminent concerns, and they looked askance at learning of classical masters and the adorers of beauty and art. They never Practised literature for the sake of art or culture. These writers influenced by the Reformation were moralists, preachers and reformers rather than Humanists or Artists.

Milton was the child both of the Renaissance and the Reformation. His childhood was spent at a time when the forces of the Renaissance were in the ascendancy. His youth witnessed the fruition of Puritanism, and his old age marked the consummation of the Puritan ideals.

In Milton's poetry there is the presence of the qualities represented by the Renaissance and the Reformation. He is both a belated Elizabethan of the Renaissance and a fervent disciple of the Reformation. Qualities that were dear to the Elizabethans are given as exuberant an expression by Milton as the qualities which the Puritans later on upheld. Thus in Milton we have traces both of the Elizabethans and the Puritans. "His childhood" says Raleigh, "was spent in the very twilight of the Elizabethan age. It was greatly fortunate for him, and for us, that he caught the after-glow of the sunset upon his face". Milton who had seen 'the after-glow of the sunset' had felt the power

of Shakespeare and Spenser and he presented the glow of the old-masters of the Renaissance period with great enthusiasm. It should be noted that the Elizabethan or the classical or the Renaissance influence permeats the early works of Milton such as *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroso*. The Puritan element begins to assert in *Comus*, *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost* though the Renaissance influence is not yet defunct and still has its hold on the poet's mind. In *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* Milton ceases to be an Elizabethan and a lover of classicism and the Renaissance and ends by being a thorough-going Puritan.

Ode on the Nativity L'Allegro and Il'Penseroso: Let us examine the Renaissance elements in poetry. Milton's first substantial poem was the *Ode on the Nativity*, which though written on a Biblical subject glows with imagination and is full of pagan imagery. It exhibits a rare combination of romamtic movement with classic strength. The Hellenic or the Renaissance element is paramount in the two succeeding poems—*L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso*. In these poems of the Horton period there is the spirit of the Renaissance at its height. They are in the grip of the Renaissance. There is little trace of Puritanism in these two poems. On the other hand there is much that is anti-Puritan. In *L'Allegro* the echoes of romance, the dancing and rustic spirits, the visit to the playhouse and the references to Shakespeare and Ben Jonson clearly mark out the poet as the child of the Renaissance. There is no hint of the fanaticism that would shut the theatres, pull down the Maypoles on village greens, and turn 'Merrie England' into 'Psalm-Singing' England. These two poems reveal Milton's love for the joys of life and the love of nature which are Elizabethan characteristics. His love of music and the dramatic performances in both these poems is typically Elizabethan and squares with the Renaissance and the Elizabethan ideals. The following lines from *L'Allegro* represent Milton's love for the joy of life:

> Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
> Jest and youthful Jollity,
> Quips and Cranks, and Wanton Wiles,

Nods, and Becks, and wreathed smiles,
Such as hang on Hebes' cheek,
And love to live in simple sleek,
Sport that wrinkled care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.

In *Il'Penseroso* we come across the note of religion and Puritanism, though *L'Allegro* is completely free from the moral touch of a religious worshipper. In *Il'Penseroso*, we hear the religious note of Puritanism in the following lines:

There let the pealing organ blow
To the full voiced quire below
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with Sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.

Comus: In *Comus*, the Puritan seriousness and the triumph of virtue are for the first time combined with the Renaissance love for music, gorgeousness, beauty and decoration. In this masque the Puritan element comes in growing conflict with the ideals of the Renaissance and the ideal of Puritanism. As one critic puts it, "What we have called the Hellenic and Hebraic element in his work are now clearly beginning to change their relative proportions for while the vehicle adopted shows the persistence of his Hellenism, the matter and purpose exhibit the growth of his Hebraism". The Renaissance element in *Comus* comes out in the various songs and dances in the concluding part of the masque. The Puritan element finds expression in such lines of the triumph of chastity and virtue as the following:

Mortals that would follow me
Love virtue, she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to climb.
Higher than the spheary chime
Or if virtue feeble were
Heaven itself would stoop to her.
But evil on itself shall back recoil

And mix no more with goodness, when at last
Gathered like scum, and settled to itself
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed, and self-consumed if this fail
The pillar'd firmament is rottenness
And earth's base built on stubble.

Lycidas: In *Lycidas* Milton is still the student of classicism and the Renaissance but the Puritan strain is introduced in the thundering denunciation of St. Peter, accusing the corrupt Roman Catholic clergymen of times in such fierce as the following :

Blind mouths ! that scarce themselves know to hold
A sheep-hook or have learn'd ought else the least
That to the faithful herdmans' art belongs !
What recks it them ? What need they ? They are sped ;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Great on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.
But swollen with wind, and the rank mist they rot
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread.

While the use of pagan imagery and the elaborate description of flowers show Milton as a classical humanist, the introduction of St. Peter denouncing the corruptions of the clergy, reveals the grewing Puritanism of the poet.

Paradise Lost: His great epic, *Paradise Lost* is the product of the Reformation and the Renaissance. Here Milton employs the art and learning of the Renaissance in the service of religion and moral truths which had now become the dominant factors in his life. The theme of the *Paradise Lost* is based on the Bible. Milton rejects the subject of King Arthur and his round-table as the theme of his epic. His epic is a Christian epic recounting the story of the Fall of Man as told in the Bible. His aim in writing the epic is to assert "eternal Providence" and "justify the ways of God to men." There is the temper of militant Puritanism. The theme of the epic is Biblical and is directly traceable to the Puritan elements in Milton. But the

treatment of the Biblical theme of Puritanism is thoroughly classical. He employs the form of the classical epic and brings in the pagan deities as fallen angels. He presses to the service of a Puritan epic the machinery of the Renaissance. The love of romance and chivalry comes out in the epic, and these qualities are essentially the Renaissance qualities. The character of Satan is conceived and glorified in the light of Renaissance culture. The character of Satan is glorified at the expense of God, and it is due to the influence of the Renaissance. Satan like the heroes of Spenser represents Milton's Renaissance love for enterprise, and adventure. Whereas Spenser's *Faerie Queene* has knight of the Red Cross, Satan is a knight of Stygian darkness who has all attributes of knightliness which gleamed in the romances and the epics of the Renaissance. Thus in the presentation of Satan's character, Milton is animated with the Renaissance love for romance, chivalry and adventure. Hanford wisely remarks in this connection, "Milton's true kinship is not with Bunyan or Baxter; nor yet together with Cromwell and the heroes of the battle for religious and political liberty, but with those men of the older days, whose spiritual aspirations were united with the human passion for truth and beauty and who trusted the imagination as an important medium for the attainment of these ideals."

What saves *Paradise Lost* from being a complete triumph of Puritanism like *Paradise Regained* in its humanism. The Renaissance movement chiefly characterized in England by Humanism, and form the main background of the work of Spenser, Shakespeare, Bacon and Hooker. Humanism recognizes the virtues as well as the vices of human nature, accept pleasure as in itself good and recognizes in arts the fullest expression of man's sense of the higher values of life. Humanism upholds the power of reason and the freedom of the individual. It asserts essential dignity of man.

Paradise Lost is the work of a Renaissance Humanist. "It comes from the humanist side of Milton's mind. His subject is not the eternal and inscrutable Degrees of God, and the warfare of Reason and Passion in Man whom God has created free, the forfeiture of freedom through man's

surrender to passion (as in Adam's case). Adam's too great love for his tempted and erring wife ; the restoration of that freedom through the victory over temptation of the Perfect Man, the son of God ; but not himself God" (*Grierson*). In *Paradise Lost* the humanist, Milton has pointed out that God possesses a fore knowledge of man's destiny but he leaves man's will free. When Satan wanted to fly out of the Gate of Hell, Christ asked his Father if He would not like to stop Satan from working havoc on Adam and Eve. God answered that since He had granted freedom of will to all His creatures, Satan included, He could not violate His own law by stopping Satan from his nefarious and evil purpose. Man was created free, and therefore was solely responsible for his fall. This attitude of humanism embodied in *Paradise Lost* in the work of a Renaissance artist, rather than a Puritan.

In *Paradise Lost*, we find Milton championing individualism, which he had inherited from the Renaissance. The individual has the freedom of will and is responsible for his actions. This Renaissance ideal again makes the epic as a work of Humanist culture rather than a work of pure Puritanism.

Paradise Regained : The two works that followed *Paradise Lost* viz,—*Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, are completely dominated by the spirit of Puritanism. "*Paradise Regained* though an epic, is not the spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan shown by means of arguments, in which Satan is completely defeated." In *Paradise Regained*, Milton sets aside the claims of beauty, wealth, power, pelf and classical learning, and harps on the cultivation of truth, the worship of God and the acceptance of the Law of God. Milton, who had upheld beauty, now comes out with sneering words against beauty :

"Beauty stands,
In the admiration only of weak minds
Led captive ; cease to admire, and all her plumes
Fall flat and shrink in trivial toy

Milton now asserts like a Puritan divine
"To know, and knowing worship God aright,
Is yet more kingly, this attracts the soul,
Governs the inner man, the nobler part,
That other over the body only reigns."

Samson Agonistes is classical in form, but in its theme, outlook and temper, it is Hebraic. It marks the consummation of Milton's Puritanism. Thus Milton in the earlier period of his poetic carrier is a Renaissance scholar, a lover of beauty, dance, song and music ; in the middle period he is Renaissance humanist and a moral preacher, and in the concluding part of his life he ends by being a thorough-going Puritan.

"From all the works of Milton, it is obvious that Milton is not only the highest, but the completest type of Puritanism. But it is never forgotten that the culture of the Renaissance was not totally exterminated by his Puritanical bent of mind. Like Shakespeare he was thoroughly coloured with classical learning and scholarship. But it is deplorable that Milton becomes a bigot. He sometimes expresses the undesirable aspects of Puritanism—its narrowness of outlook, its want of humour and its intolerance. Moreover Milton is devoid of wide humanity and the all embracing sympathy which is noticeable in Shakespeare. His narrowed outlook and prejudiced convictions are noted in his outburst against his rivals and his hatred for women sometimes he shared the Puritan contempt for culture and advocated the stern repression which the more severe Puritans advocated. That is why Puritans have always claimed Milton to be their typical poet. To the modern mind, his controversial and theological subject matter does not appeal. He seems to write on remote and un-interesting subjects, which are not liked by the modern generation. To sum up, the Puritanical strain is apparent in (1) the choice of religious subjects, especially in the later poems ; (2) the sense of responsibility and moral exaltation ; (3) the fondness for

preaching, and lecturing, which in *Paradise Lost* is a positive weakness; (4) the narrowness of outlook, strongly Puritanical, seen in his outbursts against his opponents (as in *Lycidas*), in his belief regarding the inferiority of women and in his scorn for the "miscellaneous rabble."

CHAPTER V

MILTON'S PURITANISM

In order to understand what "Puritanism" means, we must look at the history of England for about fifty years before Milton's time. The father of Queen Elizabeth was the famous King Henry VIII. In his days, the religion in England was that of the Catholics. The Pope claimed complete authority in church affairs, and practically all the kings of Europe had to obey him in spiritual matters.

Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife, but the Pope refused to sanction this. Henry took the only way he could think of to gratify his wishes. He declared that the English Church was no longer under the Pope, but that he himself was head of the Church. To make this more complete, he brought many charges of inefficiency against the monks who had lived so long in the monasteries of England, and drive them out. This movement is known in history as the Reformation in England.

At first there was no real change in the doctrine or teachings of the Church. Englishmen were still Catholics, though they did not call themselves so. The only difference was that they looked on the king as head of the Church, instead of the Pope, and took the name of the Anglican Church. That is still the official name of the Church of England at the present day.

The rise of the Puritans. About the same time, however, another change took place. Many men were dissatisfied with the actual services of the Church. They thought that too elaborate ceremonies had come in, and that too much attention was paid to external observances,

such as the burning of incense, the use of beautiful stained glass windows, elaborate robes for the priests, and such things. They said that they wanted a purer form of religion, in which God was worshipped by the human heart, and not by means of beautiful things appealing to the eye or ear. They broke away from the church and formed their own sect, to which the name of Puritans was given.

The Puritans were not content with simplicity ; they became very severe men. They looked on all merry-making as sinful, and would have denied to the people even such innocent pleasures as dancing round the May-Pole. They were even opposed to the drama, which they thought a wicked thing. Shakespeare and his brother actors were looked upon by the Puritans as wicked men.

The Anglican Church had the support of the king, the courtiers, and the great nobles of England. When the Great Civil War started in England during Milton's time, it was a war of the king against the Parliament. The Parliament happened to consist mainly of Puritans while the king's supporters were all of the Anglican Church. The great leader of the Puritans, or the Parliament party, was Oliver Cromwell.

Now there had been a great influence over Europe for some time, called the Renaissance or the Revival of Learning. This had led to an increased study of the old classical literatures, and an effort to imitate them in English. The Renaissance writers aimed at art and culture. But the Puritans had become so severe that they were opposed to art and culture ; they would hardly allow men to read anything except the Bible. So one sees that the influence of the Reformation, which produced the Puritans, is usually opposed to the influence of the Renaissance. One could hardly belong to both movements. If he was a Puritan, he was, as a rule, an enemy of fine literature and classical learning ; if he was an Anglican, he was an admirer of the classics and a supporter of Shakespeare and the drama.

Milton was both a Puritan and a Classical scholar : Now the unusual point about John Milton is that he was influenced

by both movements. He belonged to the severe simple religion of the Puritans, and he fought on their side against the King in the Civil War. But he is, almost more than any other English writer, a classical scholar, and the main source of his literary inspiration was the classics. He was unusual in being a Puritan writer who aimed at the highest culture and refinement in his art. In this respect, he stands alone and is not a member of any school of writers.

The explanation is that Milton originally belonged to a wealthy family, and was educated at Cambridge University. He became one of the foremost classical scholars of his time, and acquired all the culture that the old universities and the Anglican Church could offer him. But he found that he could not tolerate the strict discipline of the Anglican Church, and he became a Puritan in religious belief. That does not mean that he shared the attitude of Puritans in their contempt of literature and the classics. He wrote works which showed his Puritanism in religion but his Anglican or High Church education in regard to literature.

Thus it is obvious that Milton can hardly be claimed as a Puritan writer by the party to which he belonged since there are in his works other elements which are powerful and generally opposed to Puritanism. In the *Ode*, the thought is very largely Biblical, though the manner and expression are classical. Starting from a moderate and tolerant attitude, Milton gradually progressed from the mildest to the most severe degree of Puritanism, becoming in his later years a severe bigot, intolerant of his religious opponents, and looking with scorn on all innocent amusements and pleasures. He shows none of this in the *Ode*, and there is none of this narrowness in *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso*. *Lycidas*, however, gives a strong indication of what was to come, as do the severe and lofty views on chastity which are expressed in *Comus*. The speech of St. Peter: "How well could I have spared for thee, young swain," etc., shows the stern and hostile feelings against the clergy of the Anglican Church which were ultimately to make him such a partisan of Cromwell and the parliamentary party.

Milton's combined Puritanism and Classicism: The following extract from Stopford Brooke's Classical Writers will serve to show the gradually increasing intensity and bitterness of Milton's Puritanism during the course of his literary career :

"Puritanism, when Milton began to write, was not univesally apart from literature and the fine art. In its stained and pure religion, Milton's work had its foundation, but the temple he had begun to build upon it was quarried from the ancient and modern art and letters of Greece and Italy and England. And, filling that temple, rose the peculiar incense of the Renaissance .....Even while at Cambridge, the double being in Milton makes itself felt ; the struggle between the two spirits of the time is reflected in his work. These contrasted spirits in him became defined as the political and social war deepened round his life. The second sonnet still is gay, fresh with the morn of love, Petrarch might have written it ; the *L'Allegro* does not disdain the love of Nature, ...nor does the *Il' Penseroso* refuse to haunt the dim cathedral. But yet in these two poems the deepening of the struggle is left. Milton seems to presage in them that the time would come when the gaiety of England would cease to be shared in by serious men ; when the mirth of the Cavalier would shut out the pleasures derived from lofty Melancholy, when the Puritan pensiveness would be driven to shut out the pleasure of Mirth because they shut out God.

"A few years later and the presage had come true. Milton is driven away from even the *L'Allegro* point of view. In *Comus* the wild license of the Court Society is set over against the grave and temperate virtue of a Puritan life. The unchastity, the glossing lies the glistering apparel that hid his moral deformity, the sloth and drunkenness, the light of fantastic round of the enchanter's society and court, are (it seems likely) Milton's allegory of the Court Society of his time. The stately philosophy of the Brothers, which had its root in subduing passion and its top in the love of God, the virginal chastity of the Lady, and, at the end, the releasing power of Sabrina's purity, exalt and fill

up more sternly the idea of the *Il' Penseroso*, and symbolize that noble Puritanism which loved learning and beauty only when they were pure, but holiness for more than either. It may be, as Mr. Brown supports, that there is a second allegory within the first, of Laud and his party as the sorcerer commending the cup of Rome by wile and threat to the lips of the Church, and enforcing it by fine and imprisonment, paralysing in stony fetters the Lady of the Church. It may be that in this poem, Milton called on the few who, having resisted like the brothers, but failed to set the Church free, ought now to employ a new force, the force of Purity, but this aspect of the struggle is at least not so clear in *Comus* as in *Lycidas*."

CHAPTER VI

MILTON'S POETIC STYLE AND DICTION

The difference between the dictions of Milton and Wordsworth : Milton's language is, in all his works, remarkable for its loftiness, dignity, and scholarly quality. This is the case especially in *Lycidas*, but even in the lighter lyrics of *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso*, there is not much lightening of the style. High words and noble phrases were the implements which Milton used for even his lightest subjects,—and *L'Allegro* is probably the only single poem which can, of all his works, be called "light" in the sense that it is supposed to represent merriment and enjoyment. In spite of this *L'Allegro* never loses in the quality of dignity and scholarly treatment. Milton had no quality of honour, and a certain seriousness prevails throughout even this light lyric. His flight of expression had to be sustained, and he did not practise what Wordsworth termed "sinking." For Wordsworth evolved the theory...that there is essentially no difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry. Wordsworth thought that the success of good poetry depended on its subject-matter, on its emotion and pathos, and not on language. He believed that simple everyday language could be applied to a suitable theme in such a manner as to awaken in the mind of the reader all the pleasure which poetry is supposed to create. This is a view with which Milton would have entirely disagreed, and his theory of poetic language seems as far removed from this as possible. Even when he was describing simple natural objections, Milton did not use simple and natural language. He employed a special "artificial" diction which came to be described as "classical" and was called by some critics "the grand style." It is at all times the language of a

special art, and not of natural expression of feeling. In *Lycidas* Milton employs a language which is special and elaborate, and it will be interesting to analyse it, and study some of his devices and mannerisms.

Milton's use of Latin words : In the very beginning, we must remember that at that time the English language was still in a state of growth. It had not attained the full maturity and the fixity of present-day English. The number of words in the language was not nearly so great as at the present day. No dictionary of words was to appear until the coming of Johnson many years later, and so there was certain difference of opinion as to the exact shade of meaning which certain words possessed. One writer might use a word with a certain meaning, while another man would use the same word in quite a different sense. When in need of a word to express some new idea or to indicate a particular degree of meaning, writers used boldly to borrow from French or Latin. In our study of Shakespeare, we will see that, when he was in need of a word, he never hesitated to borrow from any source whatever, or even to make up a new word for himself. Now Milton did not coin new words, but he borrowed words very freely from Latin. That he was entitled to do, for Latin has been the great storehouse from which thousands of words have been drawn to enrich the English language. The charge has been made against Milton that he borrowed too much, and that he often used a Latin word though quite a good native English word was available. With this we are not concerned, and it is sufficient to remember that Milton was a great Latin scholar, and that he was deeply impressed by the noble sounds and the dignified movement of the Latin language. There is little doubt that he actually and sincerely thought Latin words, by their very nature, to be more musical, literary, and beautiful than English words.

Not only does Milton use Latin words, sometimes in a Latin sense, but he sometimes imitates the Latin order of words in the sentence. This even makes certain passages of his works read like the literal translation of a piece of Latin prose.

Quite apart from the use of *Latin words* and the imitation of the *Latin* arrangement of the *sentence*, Milton dearly loved to use classical names for his similes and allusions. This he would do by comparing the character of his own poem to some character of Latin or Greek fable, and taking the opportunity to mention the main incidents and facts connected with the classical reference. Take for example the lines:

"What could the muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The muse herself, for her enchanting son,
Whom universal Nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His glory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore ?"

Milton's use of the homeric simile: Now such a passage as this has a double effect. In the first place, the classical literatures are the very storehouse of the romantic material of poetry, and the story of Orpheus is one of the most romantic. A passing reference to it has the result of bringing some of the glamour of the classical story into Milton's own work. In the second place, the names which are brought in: "Orpheus," "Hebrus," "Lesbian," are rich and romantic in sound and appearance, even to the reader who is not acquainted with their history. They are romantic enough to the reader who is acquainted with the sad tale of the death of Orpheus at the hands of the Thracian woman, but they are also romantic when unknown, with all the same romance that an unknown and unexplored country appeals. For such names to be unknown is to be romantic. The passage "Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old, etc." is even more striking as an illustration of this gift, but Professor Saintsbury's comment on it elsewhere in this work renders further remarks unnecessary. Milton's proper names are most carefully selected because of their beauty of sound and association. No other English writer has been so successful in the results attained by this particular device.

The elaboration of Milton's style comes largely from figure of speech. That which he employs most frequently

is Personification, while his lines abound in instances of Metaphor, Simile, and Inversion. His similes are often drawn from classical story, and are by no means a brief reference to an object or event, but often give a repetition of story which involves several lines of verse and the use of several names to expand the simile properly. The lines :

> That Orpheus' self may heave his head
> From golden slumber on a bed
> Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
> Such strains as would have won the ear
> Of Pluto to have quite set free
> His half-regained Eurydice.

are a case in point. A simile is contained here, with the general sense "harmony that would have delighted even Orpheus himself." But Milton is not content with the mere mention of the name of Orpheus ; he must have an expanding pictorial simile with a summary of the story of Orpheus and several names to give it colour. These long drawn out similes were much used in the classics, and especially in the works of Homer. They gratify both Milton's love of pictorial illustration and his liking for proper names with romantic appeal, and Milton is probably the only English poet who has made such effective use of the Homeric or Epic Simile.

Milton's uses of archaic language : There was another practice which Milton had already observed in his predecessor Spenser, and that was the deliberate use of old-fashioned and obsolete words. He chose words which were common in England in the time of Chaucer, though they had in some cases passed out of the language and, in other cases, completely changed in form and spelling. Spenser had deliberately used such old-fashioned words in *The Shepherd's Calendar* and *The Faerie Queene*, and the result of this was to make his work appear about a century older than it really was. Milton did not go nearly so far as Spenser in this respect, but he used it in moderation by bringing in here and there an old-fashioned word-form, just as makers

of modern furniture will sometimes copy some aspect of an old-fashioned and antique article. The word "silly" in line 92 of the *Ode*, and *ychained* in line 155 of the same poem, are examples of this deliberate affectation of antiquity.

Milton very often indulges in long and complex sentences. He goes on adding clause to clause until the structure of the sentence is in danger of becoming unwieldy, and there is a chance that in the maze of subordinate clauses, the reader will forget how the sentence commenced. This is also a result of classical study, and an imitation, perhaps unconscious, of the long and complex periods of classical prose writers. Of Milton's style, Professor Masson said, "The resulting structure might but for the harmonious majesty of the verse, be called not dense merely, but contorted. "In the opening of one of his prose works, we have a sentence of over four hundred words !

Personification in Milton : We have already pointed out that the whole religious system of the ancients was a great personification of Nature in every branch. In a general sense, this led to personification being a favourite device of the classical writers. Milton continually uses this figure, attributing personality to abstract qualities, as well as to the universe in general. In such lines as :

"Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips and Cranks and Wanton Wiles,
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides ;

and a score of other passages, there is just a haunting sense that the personification is a little overdone and not entirely natural. This, more than any other device used, is what gives the sense of something forced and artificial in Milton's poetic diction. In all his poems, Milton continues to impart human personality to the earth, the sun, and the sea, sometimes in the abstract and sometimes using the name of the appropriate classical god. This seems purely pagan, but is only a stylistic device.

The lofty and finished perfection of Milton's style ultimately attained its full growth in *Paradise Lost*. There his many notes blend together like "the pealing organ" which blows to "the full-voiced quire," making the perfect combination of harmony. When Milton died, his style continued to affect English poetry for many years, and was taken as a model by many young and ambitious poets, but never with anything like the success that had accompanied his efforts. The greatness and dignity of Milton's style were only possible because of the lofty themes and deep ethical force in his poetry. When men tried to employ the Miltonic style for subjects which were on a lower level, the result was stilted and pompous, giving an impression that the writer would be well advised to speak more simply. Only Milton could play on the harp which he had created.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATURE OF THE MINOR POEMS

There are certain features which may be seen in most of Milton's poems, arising from his own interests and personality. These may be summarised as : classical learning and imitation of the classics in general ; religious Puritanism, as evinced by his complete belief in the Bible ; communal Puritanism as evinced by his hostility to other religions and sects ; love of liberty and hatred of oppression.

The factor which comes first is the most important and universal, for Milton was first and foremost, a classical scholar. It must be kept in mind that in the seventeenth century, the English language was not the highly developed and universal world speech that it is to-day. Some centuries before, King Alfred had deplored that there was no writing in the mother tongue, but that all scholarship and learning were in Latin. His efforts to translate from the classics into English had revealed the poverty and inadequacy of the vernacular, and its need of immense enrichment and growth before it could ever attain to anything of the flexibility and expressive dignity of Latin. That process of enrichment and power had been going on ever since Alfred's days, and Chaucer and Spenser had shown the possibilities of English as a dignified and literary medium of writing. All the same, it was still looked upon by most scholars as of lesser dignity and importance than the Latin and Greek languages, which had for ages been regarded as the vehicles of higher scholarship and learning. Latin and Greek were looked upon as absolutely necessary in the education of a gentleman or an educated man ; the instance of the need for English in our Indian scheme of education at the present day does not supply an adequate parallel. Green could think of no more bitter sneer to level against the rising Shakespeare than that he had "small Latin and Greek."

The great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were the centres of classical study and the literatures of ancient *Greece* and *Rome formed* the greatest part of University education. The works of *Homer* and *Virgil*, of *Horace* and *Aeschylus*, were looked up to as the supreme models of excellence in writing. At Cambridge, Milton not only read all the standard classical writers but also many others who not so widely known, except to unusually profound scholars. He was indeed a student to bring joy to the heart of any teacher, for he had a deep love of learning and a joy in study for its own sake. To him it was no disagreeable task to master the secrets of the dead and gone classical writers. In his mood of *Il'Penseroso*, he glories in the pleasure of study, and says :—

"Or let my lamp at midnight hour.
Be seen in some high lonely tower.
That I may oft outwatch the Bear,
With thrice great Hermes, or unsphere,
The spirit of Plato......"

Thus he attained a proficiency in the *Latin* and *Greek* languages, especially the former, which was wonderful even for his own days of deep and serious scholarship. The stately and dignified expression of the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* the noble names of men and places, the picturesque gods and goddesses with whom the ancients peopled every corner of nature,—all became as familiar to him as his own home surroundings. In fact, these things formed his surroundings and environment as much as in the other. He had reached such a standard that his thoughts actually framed themselves in the Latin tongue, and this is the supreme test that can be applied for advanced proficiency in a foreign language. Thus it is not uncommon that Milton's training should have had the result of making him think with a Latin bias, write with a Latin and Greek ornament, rather than with images from his own English life.

The relation of the Greeks and Romans was a kind of personified nature, they were impressed by the great forces of nature, just as much as the old Scandinavians with their

wind giants and frost-giants, and gave them a symbolic human personality. Thus the sun gradually passed into the god Apollo, and the sea into Neptune, in which the original nature worship was forgotten and the worship of substituted semi-human and semi-divine figure of the god came in, in some ages even passing into idol-worship. The symbolism of those figures created by men were forgotten by men, and the worship of a vast number of picturesque gods in human form came in. The allegorical nature of the old myths and legends was forgotten ; Ceres was worshipped as a potent goddess who could affect the lives of men, and not in her original significance of the symbol of harvest. Pan was looked upon as an actual great jolly god living with his Fauns and Satyrs in the woods.

Milton's interest in classical deities is purely artistic : Milton, as an earnest Christian and a staunch believer in the Bible, did not accept this pagan worship of many gods, gods imperfect and sinful at times, and mixing freely in the lives and intrigues of mortals. But Milton as a classical scholar and a lover of noble literature, could not but be impressed by their pictures and romantic charm, and by the poetical appeal which they have had for many generations of writers. He saw that the literatures of the classics, though representing a simple and untenable paganism in religion, were nevertheless the great and inexhaustible storehouse of poetic material and romance. (His religious Puritanism, he felt, was no obstacle in the way of using this material for literary ornament.) Thus it is that we find side by side in many of his works two absolutely opposite views of life, the classical or pagan and the Christian.

This is well exemplified in the closing lines of *Lycidas*. Milton finishes up with the optimistic note :

"So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,
Where other groves and other streams along,
With the nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.

This is the purest expression of Milton's sincere Christianity founded on Biblical teaching, and expressing absolute belief in the orthodox Christian belief in the immortality of the soul after death in a heaven which has been won for us by the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross. But immediately the poet's thought changes and he goes on to say :

> "Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more ;
> Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
> In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
> To all that wander in that perilous flood."

The apparent confusion between Christian and Pagan ideals in Milton : This conception of the survival of Lycidas as the presiding spirit of the shore, received back into a particular corner of nature over which he is to rule, is the purest *Paganism* and in direct contradiction of the Christian conception with which Milton had just inspired himself. This is the pantheistic vein with which Shelley finished his elegy, when he decided that the spiritual part of Adonais must be as indestructible as his physical body, and hence will be re-absorbed in Nature, taken into the firmament as a star. We may agree with this or not, but it is a logical theory which Shelley does not contradict by the intrusion of any conflicting belief. He was never a professing Christian like Milton. Why does Milton dally with two different views, even in *Paradise Lost* in which his avowed object was to set forth in epic form the great history of the Christian faith? The answer must be that the Christian view is that in which Milton believed implicitly with all his heart and mind ; the pagan outlook is that into which he could enter with a willing suspension of unbelief for the ends of romantic effect and literary adornment. To Milton they were noble romances and dignified fictions, those of the old pagan gods, and it is in no wise a conflict with Christian beliefs to enjory them as one enjoys the fairy tales of childhood.

One point will be noted, and that is the extent to which the study of the classics and the classical religions affected Milton's style. The old Gods, Nymphs, Fauns, Genii, were personifications of Nature ; Miltion carries this further,

and personifies everything he deals with. Mirth and Melancholy, Wrinkled Care and Laughter, Nature who wantons with the Sun, her "lusty paramour," meek-eyed Peace, and retired Leisure, "that in trim gardens takes his pleasure," : all abstract qualities and conditions of life are reduced to human shape and form. In no other English poet has the figure of speech called Personification been carried to such an extent, and this is entirely as a result of his classical study.

There are even times when we see a fusion of the material from two sources, the classics and the Bible, which seem so opposite in thought. In the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, Stanza VIII, Milton alludes to the Christian belief that Christ, the Son of God, came down to live among men. But he alludes to him by the name of "Pan," who was the Greek God of Nature. There is actually no confusion between Christianity and Paganism here, for Milton's thought is single and deals only with the Christ of his own faith. But the classical word "pan" means "all" or "universal," so Milton uses it as a title for Christ meaning, "the universal God." There is complete fusion of his Christianity and his classicism here, and not contradiction.

Milton's Puritanism, spiritual and political : Of the two great sources from which Milton drew his inspiration, the literatures of classical peoples and the Bible, we may see that the *Ode* is overwhelmingly Biblical and the poems *L'Allegro*, *Il' Penseroso* and *Lycidas* are classical. The question of Milton's religious or Puritan side may now be considered, and such a consideration will be made more easy if we divide Milton's Puritanism into two aspects, (*1*) that which is purely spiritual and religious, (*2*) *that which is mingled with politics, is communal* and controversial. Now the *Ode* displays Milton's Puritan religion, his deep faith in the Bible story of Christ and all pertaining to it. This is the predominating aspect of Milton's many-sided nature which the *Ode* displays. The bitterness which Milton ultimately showed as a communal and political Puritan is not seen at all here, and the inspiration of the

Bible is stronger than that of the Greeks. The two companion poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso* are both purely lyrical, and show no more than Milton's feelings on nature and life. They are expressed in a very classicised style, and have not the naturalness and simplicity of thought and expression that we expect in poetry of nature. But there is no Puritanism in them, rather is there evidence that, at this period, Milton had not commenced to be intolerant and bigoted. In *Lycidas*, we see a further development of Milton's political and communal bias. The poem is strictly Greek in its adherence to the model of the pastoral elegy of Theocritus and Moschus, and is purely classical in language, allusions, figures of speech, and thought, finishing up with a statement of the Christian faith. But *Lycidas* is prominent in one feature, for it is here that Milton first uses his art for the denunciation of his opponents in religion, and we may say that *Lycidas* sees the commencement of his controversial and communal Puritanism.

Thus we see that the *Ode* is mainly Biblical in inspiration ; *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso* are very scholarly and classical descriptions of the feelings awakened by natural objects, and *Lycidas*, ostensibly a Greek pastoral ode to celebrate the death of a friend, is also an attack on the ignorant and corrupt clergy of the Anglican Church, who were Milton's opponents in politics as well as in religion. In some proportion or other, Puritanism and classical learning are mingled in almost all the works of Milton. The style, language and method of expression at all times are such as could have been evolved only by a profound scholars.

To turn to a particular and specialised study of the individual poems, the *Ode to the Nativity* was composed in 1629 when Milton was in his twenty-second year, and may be set down as the first of his works to show the greatness that was to come. Milton refers to it is the *Nativity Hymn*, and in the earliest edition of his collected works in 1645, it is given the first place in the volume, to serve as an appropriate prelude to the other poems.

There are two different matres used, the four opening stanzas which precede the hymn being seven-lined stanzas,

the first six lines being ten-syllabled and the concluding or seventh line having twelve syllables. This stanza had been used in the first place by Chaucer for several of his Canterbury Tales, and Spenser also had made use of it. The basic structure of the stanzas differs little from that of the *Faerie Queene.* The hymn itself is written in eight-lined stanzas with varied and interlacing rime, which are evolved by Milton himself. The Elizabethans all delighted in producing new and original variations of the structure and system of their stanzas.

The *Ode* takes up the Bible story of the birth of Christ at Bethlehem, where his mother Mary happened to be staying at the inn, so that the Infant was laid in the manger. It follows the Bible carefully in the account of the manner in which the wise men had been warned in a prophecy of the coming of the Saviour, and led to Bethlehem by a star. To this extent, the *Ode* is a true reproduction of its Scriptural models as regards incident, and is an ordinary hymn of rejoicing and devotion. There are many hymns which express this episode in the life of Christ, many of them of distinct beauty and poetic value. There are, however, one or two points in Milton's work which bear the imprint of his own personality and of his own times in the most unmistakeable manner.

The Ode foreshadows the coming greatness of Milton : In the first place, there is the nobility of thought and stateliness of diction which were the distinguishing features of all of Milton's poems. Great though the subject is in itself, inspiring though it may be to all Christians even in the simplest prose, Milton has made it more great and doubly inspiring by his dignified and noble expression. We were ultimately to see in *Paradise Lost* the extreme epic beauty and dignity which Milton attained, the combination of great thoughts and stateliness in expression. In the *Ode,* it is no exaggeration to say that we have the first indications of this quality of "loftiness" which was to become Milton's chiefest characteristic. Given a theme of nobility and greatness, he had the gift of sustaining that theme by an elevated dignity of expression which never failed. Few poets have this gift ;

either they find it necessary to keep their loftiness within the bounds of comparatively short poems or to supply interlude and "break" by varying the style. Milton was able to keep his flight in the upper air for long periods ; his muse was the eagle which lived in the clouds, and not the lark which found it necessary to return continually to the homely surface of the lower earth. Wordsworth later evolved the theory that the true poet might at times practise this "sinking" as he called it, by ceasing to be lofty, by coming down to homely themes and simple language, and thereby producing verses of the *Lucy Gray* and *Peter Bell* type. This view would have been quite uninteligible to Milton ; from the beginning, he conceived of poetry as a composition which involved a peculiarly dignified and impressive diction quite different from the language of even scholarly prose, not to speak of the simple speech of everyday life which Wordsworth tried to use as a poetic medium. Thus he spent years in study of the classical models, which formed his ideal, in the ambition to create for himself a poetic diction with the dignity, the loftiness, and the majesty of the *Aeneid* and the *Odessey*. Milton's success as an English writer consists in his having succeeded in this ambition. There is in his works no remarkable freshness or originality of thought, no deep insight into humam life of the Shakespearean kind, no startling novelty of theme. The subject matter of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, *The Ode*, was common property to all Christians and had been handled in prose and verse by a score of writers in different times. Thus it is mainly owing to his wonderful style and majestic poetic diction that Milton has been able to confer real greatness on a theme so universally known as the Birth of Christ. It is true that this "grand style" was not to find its fullest growth and development for years to come, in the epic theme of *Paradise Lost*, but still it is not exeggeration to say that in the *Ode*, it already exists, undeveloped it is true, but with all the promise of that which it was ultimately to become. The deep and inspired poetical enthusiasm is already there, the same dexterous appropriation of the most romantic and beautiful episodes and names from the classics, in such a way that their borrowed beauty seems part and parcel of his own work. The *Ode* is great because it shows for the first time the existence of those truly poetic

qualities which were to reach their full excellence in *Paradise Lost.*

At the same time, it cannot be gainsaid that the Hymn displays some of the natural immaturities of inexperience, and differs from the finished craftsmanship of *Paradise Lost* in the same way that *Love's Labour's Lost* differs from *Othello.* For one thing, it may be laid down as a very axiom of poetry that the alliteration should not be too obvious ; it should not force itself upon the ear of the reader so as to attract undue attention. Alliteration, when it becomes the mechanical stringing together of similar sounds, ceases to be a poetic virtue and becomes intolerable. Milton showed himself in *Paradise Lost* to have fully realised the judicious and tactful use of "apt alliteration's artful aid," but in the *Ode* there is a slight suggestion of "forcedness" in such lines as,

"The winds with wonder whist"

and : "Stood simply chatting in a rustic row,"

where the sound similarity forces itself upon the ear just a little too prominently to be in accordance with the highest traditions of poetic diction. This is a defect which is common to most young poets, and soon disappears with growth of taste and the training which much reading brings.

Milton affected by Elizabethan conceit : One more criticism is to be adduced, which Milton had in common with the rest of his age. From the later days of Queen Elizabeth, there had come a distinct striving after the unusual and fanciful both in prose and in verse. The *Euphues* of John Lyly led prose writers away in quest of balanced and elaborate style, with unusual similes drawn from uncommon fields of knowledge. The poets, too, were tempted to search for similes and objects of comparison which were original and unusual, and, in so doing, they became fantastic and even unnatural in their uncommonness of thought and imagery. The chief charm of a simile is its appropriateness ; the main appeal of poetic imagery lies in its beauty. When the thought which is offered strive to attract by its unusual quality, rather than by appropriateness or beauty, the result is not

so successful from the poetic pitfall, and even Milton shows signs in the *Ode* of following the popular trend and striving after "conciet." The very opening stanza of the hymn illustrates this. Here Milton depicts Nature as the paramour of the sun ; she is quick to feel some shame, however, at the coming of Christ, and puts off her gaudy dress, namely the flowers of summer, in order to be more suitably attired. This personification and imagery is distinctly strained and far-fetched, and does not appeal to our sense of the natural and aesthetic. Near the end of the poem, the effort to compare the sun to a man in bed with a pillow under his chin is equally unsuccessful and unfortunate in the imagery which it conjures up.

Apart from those natural errors, which he shares in common with all youth and his own time, there is sufficient of real poetical merit in the *Ode* to make it a contribution of value to anthology of Elizabethan verse, even had Milton ceased to write after its composition and fallen far short of the fame of *Paradise Lost.*

Milton as a poet of Nature : In the companion poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso*, we may examine with what success Milton has succeeded in his avowed aim, that of producing poetry of Nature, for they are possibly the only purely lyrical and natural poems that we have from him. In order to set up some standards for comparison, we may first glance very briefly at the methods and results of other poets who have dealt with nature, and the first name which occurs will be that of Wordsworth. In the first place, it is not difficult to see that Wordsworth wrote from direct observation of nature, gained, through actual time spent in the woods and on the hills. The scene of the daffodils dancing on the edge of a bay, the yellow primrose by the river's brim, the woods around Tintern Abbey, are described in beautiful and simple word, no effort being made to elaborate or change the objects handled. Faithful reproduction of the objects of nature, and a simple description of the emotions and responses of the poet to Nature,—these are the methods of Wordsworth. Tennyson, too, approached Nature directly and wrote from observation of the scene of English country life. His

pictures in *Mariana* are all faithfully reproduced from his own Lincolnshire surroundings, and, though he lacked the spiritual and reverential approach of Wordsworth who looked upon Nature as the visible manifestation of the presence of God. Browning has some beautiful natural descriptions, and can produce the simple lyric of feeling at times, with its spontaneous and bird-like song of delight, as in :

"O to be in England, now that April's there !"

but, as a rule, Browning is more interested in human personality and looks upon natural scenery only as the background for his interesting men and women. Shakespeare, too, was only indirectly interested in the objects of nature, trying to derive from them an analogy to human life. When the course of the small brook is stopped, so that the current is swollen and enraged, that is like the passion that is created by obstructed love. In *Much Ado*, he gives a pretty picture of the honeysuckles round the summer house, which have grown so thickly that they refuse to admit the rays of the very sun which nourished them. This immediately suggests to Shakespeare the action of a court favourite in turning against the royal master who has created him. But Shakespeare's pictures, like those of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, are unmistakably English, whether created as a backgound for humans or described because of their own intrinsic worth.

With Milton, this is hardly the case, and he "sits a little apart," from the others, like the wraith of Claverhouse seen by *Wandering Willie*. In the first place, he has not the gift of accurate pictorial description which presents a faithful picture in a few simple words by summoning up in the mind of the reader the picture of the place :

"Where honeysuckles ripened by the sun
Forbid the sun to enter."

because there is accompanying imagery of thick growth and shadow which the mind inseparably connects with the mental picture of the mass of woodbine or honeysuckle which grows round the trellis work of an English garden-

house. It is a true picture, and hence finds its counterpart in the mind and experience of the reader. It is not so in the case of Milton, for, although the scene which he describes in *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroro* are those of the English countryside, they are presented in unusual colours and from unaccustomed angles at times, so as not always to awaken the recognition and common feeling with the images which brings complete contact with the poet.

This may be due to two factors. The first is that Milton's descriptions are general and vague in character, giving dim impressions rather than a clear-cut outline. This is due to the fact that he does not give the details which should fill in the larger outline, and create a true image. In *L'Allegro*, the picture of the lark "startling the dull night, from his watch tower in the skies," does not appeal with the vivid directness of Robert Burns' description, in his address *To a Daisy*:

> "Alas! it's no thy neighbour sweet
> The bonny lark, companion meet,
> Bending thee down among the weet,
> Wi' speckled breast."

There are pictorial details in Burns' description, the peckled breast of the lark, the bending down of the daisy for a moment in the wet grass, the straightening again for the flower after the bird has joyously arisen up in the air to greet the purpling west with its song. The reality of this picture could only have come from a man who had observed and enjoyed, who had on many a summer morning seen the lark arise from the weadows of his own Ayrshire country. Whereas Milton's description could well have been written by a man who had only read about the lark, and set himself to describe its popular conception in poetic language. In spite of his immeasurably greater learning, his wonderful diction and grasp of phrase, Milton had never entered into Nature with the direct observation or deep feeling of the Lowland ploughman.

Milton's lyrics are products of Art rather than of Nature : As a consequence, all Milton's descriptions have not the

sense of actual intercourse which was possessed by so many of the Victorians. The explanation of this is that Milton was first and foremost a scholar and a lover of literature, and Nature took a second place. So deeply had he plunged into the picturesque and imaginary world of the old classical gods of nature that this became his natural atmosphere and outlook, in thinking about Nature. He thought with the mind and the outlook of an ancient Roman, and not of an Englishman. Thus there is essentially something rather artificial in Milton's descriptions of rural scenes and events, in the sense that they seem more the product of high art than of simple emotion. He seems to look at nature through literature, and not directly, and in spite of all his poetic skill, there is just the inference that his descriptions of external nature might have been written in the seclusion of his study and the company of his beloved classical authors, rather than in the open air. This, of course, may possibly be an unjust decision, and it cannot be denied that in *L'Allegro* there are one or two pleasing scenes which reflect truly the England of his own time. But he does not appear to enter into them so deeply as *Il' Penseroso* does into the dim religious light of cathedrals and chapels and the pleasures of spending the night in some high lonely tower outwatching the Bear while studying the great minds of the classical literatures Moreover the very handling of the subject tends to strengthen the view that *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroso* are poems of art, rather than of Nature. We are inclined to agree with Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, at least as far as the simple lyric of Nature is concerned, for joy in nature's beauty should not be expressed in over-elaborate language. The diction and imagery of *Tintern Abbey* do not intervene between the reader and the subject matter, but lead him to the beauty of the Wye Valley and the impressions which Wordsworth derived from it. Now in Milton, the beauty of the English scenery and the impressions which it made on the mind of the poet seem covered over with decorations of Greek art expressed in elaborate personification and other figures of speech, until the sense of rural beauty and deep emotion are at least partially obscured. But we must keep in mind the fact that the poet always presents life or nature from his own point of view, and Milton happened to look at

all things from the angle of a scholar and student, talking an intelectual rather than a sensual delight in the things that he described. Thus we have the result, the poem of nature which is not content to leave the appeal to the objects of nature, but tries, to beautify them by art, to paint the lily and gild the rainbow.

Milton's Puritanism not shown in L'Allegro and Il'Penseroso : Apart from this criticism, which is after all largely dependent on taste, there is much genius and nobility in those two poems. They show us the personality of the young man in his student days before he had plunged into the muddy pool of communal politics and religion. He has an eye for beauty, whether of town or country, and looks upon life with the tolerant and fair-minded attitude of youth. In *L'Allegro* he speaks with enjoyment of the drama, even the lighter kinds of comedy such as masque and pageantry, though those things were looked upon as actually sinful by the more severe members of the Puritan party. Then he tried the masque of *Comus* himself, but in later life, he called masques wanton and sinful. *L'Allegro*, he spoke of the pleasures of dancing, but in *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, he called this sinful too. In *Il'Penseroso*, Milton speaks of the beauty of the interior architecture of cathedral chapels, their richly-stained glass windows, their noble organs and ceremonial services, and seems to enter into the spirit of all those things with respect and admiration. But they were all points on which the Puritans refused to agree with the Anglican church, and in his later works, Milton spoke of those very things with contempt. Thus the more severe and communal side of his religion, which often disfigured both his writings and his private life later on, had not commenced to manifest itself at the time that those two poems of nature and scholarship were written, and we see a more natural and likeable Milton than the controversialist who was ultimately to give up poetry for politics.

The metre of both poems shows a command over sounds and rhythm which had never been attained before in this particular kind. He has every kind of variation and effect at his disposal, and has progressed far beyond the imitation

of others that we saw in the *Ode*. His style is now characteristic and masterly, and these two poems alone would have been enough to gain him a secure place in the annals of his century, even had *Paradise Lost* never been written.

Though the natural arrangement in all text books is to place *L'Allegro* before its companion poem, the probability seems rather to be that *Il' Penseroso* was composed first of the two. We do not possess exact dates of composition, since the *MSS*. of both poems must have remained in Milton's hands for many years, before being published in 1645. But the evidence of style and theme seem to point to the year 1632-33 as the most likely period of composition. Evidently Milton was in the country and in touch with rural scenery to some extent so it is most probable that he wrote those two compositions while at Horton, or immediately after leaving there.

Previous poems which may have suggested Il'Penseroso : The idea of writing in praise of Melancholy, by which word men then denoted the serious and contemplative life of the scholar or philosopher, was not a new one. Already at least two attempts had been made, the most notable being a song entitled *The Nice Valour*, which commences with the line :

" Hence all ye vain delights,"

and continually repeats the statement :

" Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely
melancholy."

Another poem with a similar theme had been written as preface to Burton's work *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and bore the title of "The Author's abstract of Melancholy." It is written in eight-syllabled lines rather recalling the rhythm of *Il' Penseroso*, and there are even faint resemblences in language and phrasing. Burton writes the praises of the scholar's life of seclusion and thought, and estimates both its pleasures and drawbacks, finishing up with the conclusion :

"Nought so sweet as melancholy."

There is little doubt that Milton must have read this poem, as well as *The Nice Valour*. The theme must have been one very dear to his own scholarly mind, and to his superior poetic conception it probably occurred that better treatment might be accorded to so worthy a subject. Thus with such external stimulus and suggestion, it was a natural thing for him to write *Il'Penseroso*, giving his own interpretation of the pleasures which the thoughtful and contemplative man derives from life, and the manner in which he looks upon his surroundings. To a certain extent the poem is personal and a revelation of self, in the sense that all poems are so, for the revelation that we have here is that of Milton's own likes and feelings, and it is Milton the scholar that we see, whereas other poems show Milton the Puritan, or Milton the politician.

Having written about the solemn and thoughtful man, it would be a natural step for Milton to think of writing about the cheerful and light-hearted man as a contrast or complement. This, by the well-known power of contrast, would enhance the value and appeal of *Il'Penseroso*, and also gain from it. The one is in sharp contrast with the other; one man likes to walk in full view and the other to "walk unseen"; one likes comedy and the other prefers tragedy; one likes the village rustics dancing on the green while the other is attracted by the dim religious atmosphere of a cathedral chapel with its solemn organ. There is deliberate contrast in corresponding passages of the two poems, the one showing the other in stronger lights. Though the point is not important, it seems more probable that *Il'Penseroso* was the first to be composed.

The endings of the two poems:
"These delights if thou canst give, etc."
and "These pleasures, Melancholy, give,"

seem to be conscious imitation of a well-known lyric which was widely known and sung in Milton's times, which finished with the recurring refrain:

"If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love."

It was written as a love song by a shepherd to his mistress, and so the Pastoral element would be very suitable for imitation in one who wooed the spirit of Mirth or Melancholy, instead of an earthly sweetheart.

There is one point in doubt, and that is whether Milton intended those poems to record a number of impressions gathered from general experience at all times, or whether he wished them to represent, as Dr. Masson said, "an ideal day, a day of twelve hours." If we are to accept Masson, we had better see what he has to say : he is referring to *Il'Penseroso*, in particular from line 61 onwards :

"It is the song of the nightingale that is first heard ; lured by which the youth walks forth in moonlight, seeing all objects in their silver aspect, and listening to the sounds of nightfall. Such evening or nocturnal sights and sounds it is that benefit the mood of melancholy. And then, indoors again we follow the thoughtful youth, to see him, in his chamber, where the embers glow on the heart, sitting meditatively, disturbed by no sound, save (for it may be a town that he is now in) the drowsy voice of the passing bellman. Later still, or after midnight, we may fancy him in some high watch tower, communing, over his books, with old philosophers or with poets of grave and tragic themes. In such solemn and weird phantasies let the whole night pass, and let the morning come, not gay but sombre and cloudy, the winds rocking the trees and the rain drops falling heavily from the eaves. At last, when the sun is up, the watcher, who has not slept, may sally forth ; but it is to lose himself in some forest of monumental oak or pines, where sleep may overtake him lying by some waterfall. And always, ere he rejoins the mixed society of men, let him pay his due visit of worship to the Gothic cathedral near, and have his mind raised to its highest by the music of the pealing organ."

If this is to be taken as an ideal day, we must assume *Il'Penseroso* to be a man of unlimited leisure and sufficient riches in order to live so far from the practical side of life. But it is also possible to argue that Milton does not mean

all those pleasures to come within any one day of life, but wishes to show us side by side a number of varied experiences which are drawn from a longer period. The same is the case in the other poem; one can hardly expect that one day will contain both a period of listening to fairy tales in an old farmhouse and a visit to the theatre. There is also the argument that in *L'Allegro*, Milton describes the sounds of the hunt and also of the harvest time, things which would not occur on the same day in England. So either Milton did not mean the poems to mean respectively a single day, or he has committed a blunder. But no more satisfaction is to be gained here than there is in the futile time-analyses of Shakespeare, and it is safer to assume that Milton simply meant to give an exhaustive list of the pleasures which the thoughtful man feels in life and nature, compared with those of the more cheerful and light-hearted man, and that there is no "time limit" at all. Or it is possible even to argue that *L'Allegro* and *Il' Penseroso* are the same man, but in different moods.

Il' Penseroso shows Milton's own youth: It is of interest to study the different types of character represented in the two poems. To a great extent, *Il' Penseroso* is Milton himself. We see that, even as a young man, he had that tendency to solitude, to aloofness, to being apart from other men, which ultimately made him such a bigot and such a recluse. There is as yet only the tendency, which shows itself in a love of solitude, and a liking for the pleasures of contemplation and privacy which are opposed to the sociable and companionable instinct. He is happiest when all alone at midnight in his lonely tower, with the books of the great minds of other ages. Even when in the woods, he likes to walk unseen, in a mood which is partly Byronic in its negation of human society. But there is no sign of the bitterness and intensity of feeling which were ultimately to come over him. He speaks with artistic appreciation of the architectural beauties and decorations of Anglican chapels, and the beauty of their services. And, what is more, in *L'Allegro* he shows his sympathy with the lighter side of life, and does not condemn the innocent pleasures of *L'Allegro*. Thus it is ill-advised to

attempt to make out that *Il'Penseroso* is the study of a Puritan and *L'Allegro* of a pleasure-loving Cavalier. They simply represent different types of human nature, the grave and the gay, and it happened to be with the grave that Milton was more in sympathy. But in not a single line does he show intolerance of the tastes and pursuits of *L'Allegro*, though in later years he joined with the Puritans in their condemnation of the lighter drama, of "wanton masque and midnight ball," of "mixed dance" and of the rites and ceremonies of the Anglican Church. Thus it would seem that Milton was hardly a Puritan at all when he wrote these two poems, or at least was not hostile to the Anglican Church in which he had been brought up. It was in later years when "Puritan" and "Anglican" commenced to have a political, as well as a religious sigificance, that Milton commenced to show the intense communalism of his party.

The great charm of these two poems, as well as their claim to greatness, lies in the fact that they are among the very first poems of the description of nature to be found in English. There is, what Chaucer and Spenser had not really produced, a certain pictorial power and ability to transfer the beauty of external nature to their lines. As we have said already, there were still some two centuries to pass before we had the further development of the Victorians with their faithful representation of natural objects. which was more accurate in its painting than of Milton. We cannot expect to find in Milton the wonderful mood of spiritual rapture, in which Wordsworth sees within external nature a universal power which he identifies with God. Milton's God was individual and personal the God of the Bible who threw Satan and his angels out of heaven, and Wordsworth's ideas might possibly have seemed irreligious and blasphemous to the earnest Puritan poet. But in spite of all this, there is real descriptive and pictorial power in these two poems, a little aritificial and non-English, but undeniably possessing a greatness which even the moderns do not possess in that particular kind.

I

L'ALLEGRO

Introduction

The two poems *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso* present a contrast between two different moods—one of mirth (joy) and the other of melancholy (sadness). Milton seems to have borrowed the idea of a contrast between these two dispositions from a forgotten poem prefixed to the first edition of Burton's "Anatomie of Melancholy" entitled "The Author's *Abstract* of Melancholy, of a Dialogue between Pleasure and Pain." An immortal poet, he was a widely read scholar and might have been indebted to various writers for certain of his sentiments and images but that does not, in any way, detract from the greatness of his work. "The date of these two poems has not been ascertained; but it seems probable that these two enchanting pictures of rural life, and of the diversified delights arising from a contemplative mind, were composed at Horton" to which place Milton went to reside with his father in 1632 and where he stayed at least for five years.

The poet wishes to be one of the crew of Mirth and Liberty, or to be a devotee of Music and Poetry—and lapped in the soft Lydian airs", and "Married to immortal verse." The pleasures mentioned in the poem are romantic in spirit and cover a wide range. The poet gives a free reign to his imagination which roams over the hills and dales, towered cities and busy market places, and watches with delightful musings, the beauties of the dawn among the snow-clad mountains.

> "Where the great Sun begins his state,
> Robed in flames and amber light."

In this romantic conception of his theme Milton anticipates the great Romantics of the nineteenth century with whom the delights of Nature became a creed of devotion.

Milton is the great religious poet of England who tried "to justify the ways of God to man" in his *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. He attempted to bring the colossal subjects within the compass of his poety, but here for once he has chosen the common themes instead of the grand themes of heavens and the ultimate fate of mankind. In a simple, wishful mood he invokes the spirit of Mirth, glances at the shifting scenes of the world with a panoramic vision and ends with the desire to live in the company of Mirth, if she can give him the joys he has mentioned. "He places himself so sympathetically, close to the daily tasks and pleasures of the ordinary, unimportant men and women." But they are not the carnal pleasures, or pleasures of a sensual type. They are the highly refined and noble type of joys in which innocent men and women in the world, and men of taste in particular, have ever taken delight.

Having made a close study of the ancient classics of the Greeks and the Romans, Milton makes extensive allusions to Greek and Roman mythology. He compares Melancholy to Cerberus, the watch-dog at the gates of hell, born at midnight in the Stygian regions of hell, and Mirth as Euphrosyne, the goddess of merriment. He conceives her to be born of lovely Venus at a time when Zephyr, the West Wind, was playing with Aurora, the Dawn. Her similes are compared to the joyful feelings on Hebe's cheek. And the Music for which his soul yearns should be superior to that of Orpheus who was on the verge of bringing his dead wife from the next world but was snatched away by the hard condition imposed by Pluto.

There are lines in this poem which have become famous in the English literature for their beauty and poetic charm, *e.g.*

> Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee,
> Jest, and youthful jollity,
> Quips and Cranks and wanton Wiles,
> Nods and Becks and wreathed Smiles.

Or again,

> And every shepherd tells his tail,
> Under the hawthorne in the dale.

The *Penseroso* and the *Allegro*, notwithstanding that each piece is the antithesis of the other, are complementary rather than contrary, and may be, in a sense, regarded as one poem, whose theme is the praise of the reasonable life. It resembles one of those pictures in which the effect is gained by contrasted masses of light and shade, but each is more nicely mellowed and interfused with the qualities of the other than it lies within the resources of pictorial skill to effect. Mirth has an undertone of gravity, and melancholy of cheerfulness. There is no antagonism between the states of mind depicted ; and no rational lover whether of contemplation or of recreation, would find any difficulty in combining the two......The landscape painting is that of the seventeenth century, absolutely true in broad effects, sometimes ill-defined and even inaccurate in minor details. Some of these blemishes are terrible in nineteenth-century eyes, accustomed to the photography of our Victorian poets. Milton would probably have made light of them, and perhaps we owe him some thanks for thus practically refuting the heresy that inspiration implies infallibility. Yet the poetry of his blindness abounds with proof that he had made excellent use of his eyes while he had them, and no part of his poetry wants instances of sublte and delicate observation worthy of the most scrutinizing modern :–

> "Thee chauntress, oft the woods among
> I woo, to hear thy evensong :
> And, missing thee, I walk unseen
> On the dry, smooth-shaven green."

"The song of the nightingale," remarks Pocock, "ceases about the time the grass is mown." The charm, however, is less in such detached beauties however exquisite, than in the condensed opulence–and in the general impression of 'plain living and high thinking' in the midst of every charm of nature and every refinement of culture, combining the ideals of Horton with the ideals of Cambridge"

(*Richard Garnett, LL. D.*)

L'ALLEGRO

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
 Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born
In Stygian cave forlorn,
 'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!
Find out some uncouth cell,
 Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-raven sings;
 There, under ebon shades and low-browed rocks,
As ragged as thy locks,
 In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell,
But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
In Heaven ycleped Euphrosyne,
And by men heart-easing Mirth;
Whom lovely Venus at a birth,
With two sister Graces more,
To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore:
Or whether (as some sager sing);
The frolic wind that breathes the spring,
Zephyr, with Aurora playing,
As he met her once a Maying,
There on beds of violets blue,
And fresh-blown roses washed in dew,
Filled her with thee, a daughter fair,
So buxom, blithe, and debonair,
 Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips, and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods and Becks, and wreathed Smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides,

Paraphrase

Lines 1—10. O hateful Melancholy, leave me and go away from me. You are the child of Cerberus (husband) and the black Midnight (wife of Cerberus) and were born in the deserted Stygian (hellish) cave in the midst of frightful spirits, fearful cries and ugly sights. Go, and find for yourself some dark, hideous cave where the hovering Darkness spreads his watchful wings and the night raven (a bird that cries at night) sings its dreary songs. Live there for ever in the dark Cimmerian desert under the black shades and low-edged rocks which are as rugged and rough as your hair.

Lines 11—24. But come, O beautiful goddess, who are called in Heaven by the name of Euphrosyne while the men call you heart easing Mirth : the beautiful Venus (goddess of love) bore you to the merry Bacchus (god of wine and revelry) at a birth along with two other sister Graces (*Meat* and *Drink*). (*Lines 17—24*). Or perhaps, as some wiser mythologists tell us, the playful Zephyr (West wind) which is a herald of spring, met Aurora (the dawn goddess) while she was sporting and gathering flowers ; and there, on the beds of blue violet and dew-washed, freshly blossomed roses, he filled or impregnated her with you who are a beautiful, sprightly gay and elegant daughter.

Lines 25—32. Come quickly, Nymph (the poet addresses Mirth as Nymph) and bring with you all the tokens and gestures of merriment : bring fun and youthful gaiety, satirical and fanciful sayings and sportive tricks, nods and merry gestures and smiles which curl and twist the features, and hang constantly on the cheek of Hebe (the personification of youth, daughter of Jove and Juno) and love to live in the smooth natural hollows of the face. Bring sport or play which mocks at anxiety that wrinkles a man's face and bring Laughter which makes a man hold his sides because of excessive joy.

Come, and trip it as ye go,
On the light fantastic toe;
And in thy right hand lead with thee,
The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty;
And, If I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved pleasures free;
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow,
Through the sweet-briar or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine;
While the cock with lively din,
Scatters the rear of Darkness thin;
And to the stack, or the barn-door,
Stoutly struts his dames before:
Oft listening how the hounds and horn,
Cheerly rouse the slumbering Morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill:
Sometime walking, not unseen,
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate,
Where the great sun begins his state,
Robed in flames and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his sithe,
And every shepherd tells his tale,
Under the hawthorne in the dale,
  Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures,
Whilst the landskip round it measuses:
Russet lawns, and fallows gray,

Lines 33—36. Come and walk lightly on your sportive and wild toes leading in your right hand sweet Liberty which is a Nymph of the mountains.

Lines 37—52. And O Goddess of Mirth, if I pay to you the proper homage of a worshipper, be gracious enough to allow me to become one of your followers so that I may live with you and the mountain nymph Liberty and enjoy all the innocent pleasures freely, I shall then be free to hear the lark flying high and frightening the dull night with its songs from the watch-tower of the Heavens, till the variegated (marked with different colours) morning rises in the east and the lark comes to my windows in spite of all sorrows and wishes me a good morning through the sweet-briar or the vine or the Honeysuckle (all these three are plants often growing against the side or walls of houses). (*Lines 49—52*). All this while, the cock dispels (drives away) the thin remainder of Darkness (twilight) by means of its merry cries and walks proudly before the hens towards the pile of hay or the store-house.

Lines 53—68. And it is often delightful to listen to the sounds of the hunting dogs and the bugle which come out merrily from the side of some grayish-white hill and awaken the sleepy morning and fill the high wood with sharp echoes or sounds. (*Lines 52—62*). Sometimes it is pleasant to walk in the open by a line of closely growing elms (a kind of tree) or on the green mounds straight towards the eastern gate where the glorious sun, which is dressed in flames and golden light, begins its heavenly tour or glorious procession while the clouds are robed and adorned in a thousand beautiful colours. (*Lines 63—68*). Close at hand, the ploughman looks at the furrows in the field and whistles in joy while the dairy-girl sings her gay song and the reaper sharpens his sickle (an instrument for cutting grass etc.) and every shepherd counts his sheep under the hawthorn (a small tree) in the valley.

Lines 69—80. At once my mind's eye catches sight of new and delightful objects while the landscape spreads itself before me : and it can see the reddish-brown grasslands and the gray, untilled and unsown areas where the flocks of sheep

Where the nibbling flocks to stray ;
Mountains on whose barren breast
The labouring clouds do often rest ;
Meadows trim with daisies pied ;
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide.
Towers and battlements it sees
Bosomed high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The cynosure of neighbouring eyes.
Hard by, a cottage chimney smokes
From betwixt two aged oaks,
Where Corydon and Thyrsis met
Are at their savoury dinner set
Of herbs and other country messes,
Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses ;
And then in haste her bower she leaves,
With Thestylis to bind the sheaves;
Or, if the earlier season lead,
To the tanned haycock in the mead.
Sometimes with secure delight
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth and many a maid
Dancing in the chequered shade ;
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday,
Till the livelong daylight fail :
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat,
How fairy Mab the junkets eat :
She was pinched and pulled, she said ;
And he, by friar's lantern led,
Tells how the drudging goblin sweat
To earn his cream-bowl duly set,
When in one-night, ere glimpse of morn,

keep wandering about eating little bits of grass: it sees the bare tops of the mountains on which the tired cloudes often lie for repose (rest) and pasture-lands nicely decorated with daisies, shallow streams and wide rivers: it sees towers and walls of an old castle rising out of the thick groves of trees where, perhaps, some beautiful lady lives who is the centre of everybody's attention in the neighbourhood.

Lines 81—90. Close to this castle in the wood, the smoke is rising out of the chimney of some cottage between two old oak-trees where Corydon and Thyrsis (pastoral names of peasants) having met together, are sitting at their delicious (tasty) dinner consisting of herbs (a plant) and other country products which the neat and tidy Phillis has prepared, and sets before them. After serving the dinner, she leaves the shady enclosure quickly and goes with Thestylis to bind the bundles of corn; or if it is the earlier season, she wends her way to the yellowish-brown pile of hay (dry grass) in the meadow.

Lines 91—116. Sometimes the small villages on the upland with their free and safe delights attract the attention when the cheerful bells are ringing and the gay rebecks (a musical instrument like the violin) are sending forth their sweet music to numerous young men and maids who are dancing in the variegated shade of the trees. (*Lines 97—99*). And the young and the old come out for sport and merriment in the sunshine of a holiday and go on sporting till the day declines and the light begins to fade into twilight. (*Lines 100—102*). And then all of them gather in a group to enjoy the drinking of fragrant nut-brown wine and stories are told about many tricks and clever deeds and about the fairy Mab who eats up all the curds and creams of the dairy at night. (*Lines 103—116*). One of the girls tells the company how she was pinched and pulled by the mischievous fairy and a young man relates his own story how he was led by the will-o' the-wisp (it is the *Jack and lantern*, which led people in the night into marshes and waters) and how he made the hardworking spirit (called Robin Goodfellow) work hard to earn his cream-bowl set properly as his rewards, because in one night, before the rise of the dawn, this spirit beat out

His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn,
That ten day-labourers could not end;
Then lies him down the lubbar fiend,
And, stretched out all the chimney's length,
Basks at the fire his hairy strength,
And crop-full out of doors he flings,
Ere the first cock his matin rings,
Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,
By whispering winds soon lulled asleep,
 Towered cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men,
Where throngs of knights and barons bold,
In weeds of peace, high triumphs hold,
With store of ladies, whose bright eyes,
Rain influence, and judge the prize,
Of wit, or arms, which both contend,
To win her grace whom all commend,
There let Hymen oft appear,
In saffron robe, with taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With masque and antique pageantry;
Such sights as youthful poets dream,
On summer eves by haunted stream,
Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learned sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild,
 And ever, against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce,
In notes with many a winding bout,
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie,
The hidden soul of harmony;
That Orpheus' self may heave his head,
From golden slumber on a bed,

the grain from the whole corn by means of his invisible flail (an implement for threshing corn)—a work which even ten labourers could not finish in so short a time. After threshing the corn the sturdy and stupid spirit returns into the house (fatigued with the task) and, filled with his cream-bowl, throws himself down and lying full length along the whole breadth of his fireplace, warms his sturdy and hairy body before the fire. Then finally, he goes out of doors, fully charged with his bowl of cream, even before the cock sings out the song of the morning. After telling all these tales about fairies and fiends, the country peasants and maids go to bed and are soon lulled into sleep by the murmuring breezes.

Lines 117—124. The poet's imagination now turns to the mirth in towns at night and we can see the towered cities full of delightful sights and the busy gatherings of men where numerous brave knights and barons hold rich revels and masks and other shows in their most splendid dresses in the company of lovely ladies whose bright eyes spread sweetness all around and judge the deservings of witty men and soldiers who try to win the favour of the most beautiful women, admired by all.

Lines 125—130. Let Hymen (the god of marriage) come often in the midst of these gatherings wearing clothes of deep-yellow colour, carrying a light in his hand and bringing with him great glory, feasting, sports masked performances, old-fashioned shows and all those gay sights which the passionate poets fancy on summer evenings by the side of streams where spirits often visit.

Lines 131—134. These sports will be followed by a visit to the busy stage (theatre) where Johnson will show his great art or sweet Shakespeare the child of Fancy—will sing his songs with a certain wild and native elegance.

Lines 135—152. And, to keep me always safe from the consuming worries of life, O Mirth, wrap me in gentle and sweet tunes of music which may sing out poems of permanent worth in notes so sweet that they may pass into the depth of the melting soul with many turns and twists of

Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear,
Such strains as would have won the ear,
Of Pluto to have quite set free,
His half-regained Eurydice,
  These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee I mean to live.

harmonious sweetness lengthened out with the wild enthusiasm and melodious skill of the musician (*Lines 142-144*). The sweet voice will be flowing through the various tunes and untying all the chains which bind the hidden soul of Music or showing all the hidden powers of music (*Lines 145—150*), so that even Orpheus (a mythical Greek poet and musician) will raise his head from his golden sleeps on heaps of flowers of paradise and hear music which would have charmed the ear of Pluto to such an extent that he would set free Eurydice—the wife of Orpheus. (*Lines 151—152*) :—O Mirth, if you can give me such delights as these, I should always live in your company.

L'ALLEGRO

Notes and Explanations

Lines 1—10. Gist :—The poet bids Melancholy to leave him and says that it was born in the hideous caves of hell and his heart, therefore, is no fit abode for it. It should retire to some dark and desolate cave in the Cimmerian desert and live there for good.

Hence—go away. *Loathed*—hateful ; despicable. *Melancholy*—gloom ; sadness. *Cerberus*—The hound in Greek mythology that watched the gate of hell. In reality Cerberus was not the legitimate husband of Night. Erebus was her legitimate husband and Milton must have been acquainted with this mythology, but as Melancholy is here the creature of Milton's imagination, he had a right to give her what parentage he pleased, and to marry Night, the natural mother of Melancholy, to an ideal husband that would best serve to heighten the allegory. Hence he says that Melancholy is the daughter of Cerberus and Night. *Stygian*—hellish : of hell. Styx is one of the rivers of Hades (hell) across which Charon ferries the shades of the departed. Charon, in Greek mythology, was the ferry-man who rowed the shades of the death across the river Styx in the lower world. *Cave forlorn*—desolate or deserted cave. *Horrid*—offensive ; shockingly ugly. *Shrieks*—cries ; screams.

Sights unholy—unholy sights ; abominable or hateful sights. *Hence. . . . . . and sights unholy*; **Expl :** The poet, in a spirit of disgust, bids the hateful Melancholy to leave him and exposes her mean origin by tracing her parentage to the blackest Midnight (the mother of Melancholy) and Cerberus (the father). Even the place of her birth was odious and horrible as it was a desolate cave in Hades or hell where nothing good can ever be seen but horrid shapes and hateful sights, where no comforting sound ever soothes the ear and only the horrifying screams and cries fill the atmosphere.

Lines 5—10. *Uncouth*—unsightly : ugly. *Cell*—cave *Brooding*—hovering : prevalent. *Darkness*—The poet personifies darkness ; hence D capital. *Jealous*—this word elludes to the *watch* which fowls keep when they are sitting. The word, therefore, means watchful : anxiously heedful. *Night-raven*—a bird that cries at night. *Ebon-shades*—black shades. Ebony is a wood which is hard and heavy like stone and black in colour. *Low-browed rocks*—rocks with low edges. *Ragged*—rugged. Ragged is not uncommon in old English writers, applied to *rock*. *Locks*—hair. *Cimmerian*—dismal : gloomy : extremely dark. According to Homer the *Cimmeri* were a tribe who are fabled to have lived in perpetual darkness and mist. *Dwell*—live. *Find out some. . . . . .desert ever dwell* : **Expl** : The poet's heart is no fit abode for Melancholy ; therefore he bids it to find out some dark and hideous cave where perpetual darkness prevails and nothing but the dreary cries of the nightraven can be heard. Such gloomy surroundings indeed will suit a dismal inhabitant like Melancholy and she should live there for ever in the black desert under the thick and heavy shades of darkness, beneath low-edged rocks which are as rough and ugly as her own ragged hair.

Lines 11—24. Gist : The poet invites the goddess of Mirth and tells us about her happy birth which took place as a result of union either between Venus and Bacchus or between Zephyr and Aurora on beds of flowers in spring.

Lines 11—16. Fair -beautiful. *Yelp'd*—called. *Euphrosyne*—she was one of the three charities or graces who were daughters and attendants of Venus (the goddess of Love):

She represents merriments. *Heart-easing*—soothing. *Mirth* —joy. *Venus*—according to Roman mythology, the goddess of love, originally of spring, patron of flowergardens, but identified with the Greek goddess, Aphrodite. *Two sister graces*—Meat and Drink; the two sisters of Mirth. *Ivy-crowned*—wearing crowns of ivy—an evergreen creeping plant. *Bacchus*—the god of wine, son of Jupiter and Semele. *Bore*—brought forth; produced; gave birth to. *But come......ivy-crowned Bacchus bore*: **Expl.** Calling upon the beautiful and generous goddess of Mirth, the poet, in happy terms, describes her possible origin. He says that she is called by the name of Euphrosyne in Heaven while the men of this world call her by the name of heart-easing Mirth. She was produced by Venus as a result of her happy union with Bacchus along with two other sisters Meat and Drink. "Eat, drink and be merry" is a saying that derives its origin, evidently from these three sister graces—Euphrosyne (merriment), Meat and Drink and a man's joy would be incomplete without any one of these.

Lines 17—24. *As some sager sing*—as some wiser mythologists relate. Milton thinks that those who give to Mirth such gross companions as *Eating* and *Drinking* are less sage (wise) mythologists than those who say that she was the daughter of Aurora and Zephyr. *Frolick*—playful, sportive. *That breathes the spring*—that brings or heralds the spring. *Zephyr*—West Wind. *Aurora*—the goddess of dawn. *A Maying*—gathering blossoms of the hawthorn (a bush) which blooms in May. *Violets*—flowers of a kind. *Fresh-blown*—newly blossomed. *Filled her with thee*—impregnated her with you. *Buxom*—sprightly; lively; brisk. *Blithe*—gay; cheerful. *Debonair*—elegant. *Or whether (as some sager sing)......blithe, and debonair*. **Expl.** According to another group of wiser mythologists the playful Zephyr which is a herald of spring was, one day, playing with the dawn-goddess Aurora and gathering the gay flowers in May. The loveliness of weather filled their hearts with a new zeal of mutual love and so, on the beds of blue violets and newly-blossomed roses which had been washed in dew, Zephyr impregnated Aurora with Mirth who was destined to be a beautiful daughter, sprightly; cheerful and elegant.

Lines 25–32. Gist: Addressing Mirth as Nymph, the poet bids her to bring all the merry tokens of joy such as smiles, jests, witty remarks, sports and laughter.

Haste thee—make haste; hurry. *Nymph*—the spirit of Mirth. *Jest*—jokes. *Jollity*—gaiety; cheerfulness. *Quips and Cranks*—a *Quip* is a satirical joke, a smart repartee or witty remark. By *Cranks*, a word yet unexplained, we are here to understand cross-purposes, or some other similar conceit of conversation, surprising the company by its intricacy or embarrassing by its difficulty. Both the words may, therefore, mean satirical and fanciful sayings. *Wanton Wiles*—sportive or wild tricks. *Nods*—a nod means the moving of head up and down, denoting consent or approval. *Becks*—merry gestures. *Wreathed smiles*—a wreath means a garland. Smiles are wreathed, because in a smile the features are wreathed or curled and twisted. *Such as hang on Hebes cheek*—smiles that hang on the cheek of Hebe who is the personification of youth, daughter of Jove and Juno. *In dimple sleek*—in sleek dimple: in smooth and elegant hollow of the cheeks. *Wrinkled care*—Care or anxiety or worry which causes wrinkles (furrows) on the face of a man. *Derides*—mocks at; makes fun of. *Laughter holding both his sides*—laughter which is so violent that the man who laughs has to hold his sides to control it.

Haste thee, Nymph . . . . holding his sides. **Expl.** Speaking to the Nymph or the spirit of Mirth, the poet says, "O Nymph, make haste and come here bringing with you all the tokens and gestures of joy." A happy company is always ringing with witty talk and merry laughter. Therefore the poet asks Mirth to bring all the essentials of joy, such as jokes, youthful gaiety, satirical and fanciful sayings, cunning and wild tricks, nods and cheerful gestures. He wants her to bring hearty smiles that curl and twist a man's features and live in the natural smooth hollows of the cheeks. He bids her to bring sportive activities which mock at anxieties or worries of every sort and finally he asks for side-breaking laughter which on account of its violence, may compel the merry men to hold their sides with their hands. All these are symbols of unrestrained and pure delight.

Lines 33—52. Gist: The poet, in these lines, asks Mirth to bring the mountain-nymph, and Liberty along with her. He wants to become her faithful follower so that he may enjoy the songs of the lark, the coming of the dawn and the strutting of the cock before its hens.

Trip it—walk lightly. *Fantastic toe*—fantastic toes; wild and sportive toes. The poet uses *light* and *fantastic* because in unrestrained joy and liberty the goddess of Mirth is free to go anywhere as her wild fancy guides her. *Mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty*—Doctor Newman supposes that Liberty is here called the mountain-nymph, "because the people in the mountainous countries have generally preserved their liberties longest, as the Britons formerly in Wales, and the inhabitants in the mountains of Switzerland." T. Warton says, "Milton's head was not so political on this occasion. Warmed with the poetry of the Greeks, I rather believe that he thought of the Oreads (mountain-nymphs) of the Grecian mythology whose wild haunts among the romantic mountains of Pisa or so beautifully described in Homer's Hymn to Pan. The allusion in general, to inaccessible and uncultivated scenes of nature, such as mountainous situations afford, and which were best adapted to the free and uninterrupted range of the Nymph Liberty. *Honour due*—due or proper honour. *Admit me of the crew*—allow me to be one of your crew or followers. *Unreproved pleasures free*—blameless, innocent pleasures which are not subject to reproof; honest pleasures. *Lark*—a well-known singing bird. *Startle*—frighten. *Dappled dawn*—morning that is marked with different colours. *Doth rise*—does rise; rises. *Good morrow*—good morning. *Vine*—the grape plant. *Sweet-briar and Eglantine*—both these are the same plant. *Twisted Eglantine*—by the *twisted Eglantine*, the poet means the Honey-suckle which is a climbing shrub with beautiful cream-coloured flowers. *Lively din*—merry noise or cries. *Scatters the rear of Darkness thin*—scatters the thin rear of darkness: dispels or drives away the remaining part of darkness. By *thin rear of Darkness*, Milton means the twilight of the early dawn when the cock crows and the twilight begins to change into the brightness of the morning. It seems as if the cock is

driving away the remainder of the darkness of night by means of its loud cries. *Stack*—a pile or large heap of hay. *Barn*—a building in which grain or hay is stored. *Stoutly struts*—struts stoutly : walks proudly. *His dames before*—before his dames : before the hens.

Lines 41—48. *To hear the lark . . . . Or the twisted eglantine* ; **Expl.** The poet wishes to become a follower of Mirth and the mountain-nymph, Liberty, so that he may take unsullied delight in all the gay objects and spectacles of nature. Here he longs to hear the lark beginning his flight early in the morning and dispelling the dull night with his songs from the watch-tower of the Heavens, till the dawn comes with its various tints and colours in the East. Indifferent to the little sorrows that weigh upon the human heart the lark will come and bid him good morning, peeping through the creepers which cover the walls and windows of his house. The song of the ascending and soaring lark and the welcome light of the fresh morning which comes passing through the foliage into our rooms, have been beautifully described by Milton.

Lines 53 - 68. Gist : These lines present the morning sounds and sights, such as the barking of the hounds and the sounds of the bugle from the hillside : the golden light in the east and the rosy clouds above : the ploughman in the field, the dairy-maid, the reaper, and the shepherd counting the sheep happily.

Hounds—hunting dogs. *Horn* - bugle. *Cheerly*—merrily. *Rouse*—awaken. *Slumbering morning*—drowsy or sleepy morning. *Hoar hill*—grayish-white hill ; the hill is white probably due to frost. *High wood echoing shrill*—the high wood resounding with the sharp sounds of the hounds and the bugles.

Lines 53—55. Expl. It is really quite exciting to hear the sounds of the barking hounds and blowing horns coming from the grayish-white hillside and awakening the sleepy morning in a merry way, while the high wood resounds with the cries of the hunting party. *Not unseen*—in the open while other men can see him. In the *Il'Penseroso* the

poet uses the phrase, he walks *unseen*, which shows the gloominess of the man who seeks solitude and avoids company and does not wish to walk in the open where men may see him. Here the cheerful man wants to walk freely and cheerfully in the open because he is happy and does not avoid other men. "Happy men love to have witnesses of their joy : the splenetic (melancholy men) love solitude": Hurd. *Hedge-row elms*—a line of closely growing elms (a kind of tree). *Hillocks*—small hill mounds. *Where the great sun begins his state*—In this line, there is an illusion to a splendid or royal procession. The *eastern gate* stands for the east where the sun begins its glorious procession of diurnal journey. *State* means the splendid procession. *Robbed in flames*—dressed in flames or red coloured light. *Amber*—golden. This line is a description of the sunrise, as it comes with its golden light. *The clouds in thousand liveries dight*—the clouds dight or adorned in a thousand liveries (dresses) : the line paints the picture of the morning clouds which cover the sky in the east and are beautified by the various colours which the rising sun imparts to them. *Ploughman*—the farmer who ploughs the land. *Furrow'dl and*—furrowed land : land in which furrows or trenches have been made by the plough. *Milk-maid*—girl who carries milk from the dairy to the market : dairy-maid. *Singeth blithe*—sings blithely or cheerfully. *Mover*—reaper. *Whets*—sharpens. *Sithe*—scythe : reaping instrument or sickle with which grass is cut. *Every shepherd tells his tale*—every shepherd counts his sheep when he takes them to the field from the fold. The word *tale* does not here mean stories told by shepherds, but it is a technical term for *numbering* sheep, which is still used in Yorkshire and the distant countries. *Tale* and *tell*, in this sense, were not unfamiliar in English poetry in and about Milton's time. The shepherd opened his fold and took the *tale* of his sheep, to see if any were lost in the night. Shepherds, of course, will not tell stories or sing songs early in the morning. *Hawthorn*—a small tree. *Dale*—valley.

Lines 53–68. Expl. "An ingenious critic observes that this morning landscape of *L'Allegro* has served as a repository of imagery for all succeeding poets on the same subject. The poet is describing a very early period of the

morning : and this he describes, by selecting and assembling such picturesque objects as accompany that period and such as were familiar to an early riser. He is waked by the lark, and goes into the fields. The sun is just emerging, and the clouds are still hovering over the mountains. The cocks are crowing, and with their lively notes scattering the lingering remains of darkness. Human labours and employments are renewed, with the dawn of the day. The hunter (formerly much earlier at his sport than at present) is beating the covert, and the slumbering morn is roused with the cheerful echo of hounds and horns. The mower is whetting his scythe to begin his work. The milk-maid, whose business is of course at daybreak, comes abroad singing. The shepherd ópens his fold and takes a *tale* of his sheep to see if any were lost in the night."

Lines 69 - 80. Gist : The poet's imagination, now, wanders from one object to another and he sees the reddish-brown grasslands with sheep here and there, mountains with clouds hanging over them, open lands with flowers, streams and rivers and the towers of a castle rising out of a thick grove of trees.

Straight—at once. *Hath caught*—has caught sight of ; has been. *Landskip round it measures*—landscape measures or spreads around it. *Russet*—reddish-brown in colour. *Lawns*—grassy fields. *Fallows*—untilled and uncultivated areas. *Nibbling flocks*—flocks or groups of sheep eating little bits of grass. *Stray*—wander here and there. *Barren breast*—barren tops : tops that yield little vegetation.

Labouring clouds—clouds that have to carry rain for long distances and climb the arduous heights of the mountains. *Meadows trim*—trim meadows : fine pasture-lands. *With daisies pide*—decorated with daisies (flowers of a kind). *Shallow brooks*—streams that are not deep. *Battlements*—walls. *Bosomed high in tufted trees*—standing high, surrounded by trees with clustered or thick foliage (leaves). *Towers and battlement . . . . in tufted trees*—this was the great mansion-house in Milton's early days, before the old-fashioned architecture had given way to modern arts and improvements. Turrets and battlements were conspicuous

marks of the numerous new buildings of the reign of King Henry the Eighth, and of some rather more ancient, many of which yet remained in their original state, unchanged and undecayed. *Some Beauty lies*—some beautiful lady lives. *Cynosure*—anything that strongly attracts attention or admiration.

Towers and battlements . . . . of neighbouring eyes. **Expl.** The eye of the poet roves over the beautiful landscape, mountains and meadows and then catches sight of a great mansion-house with its old-fashioned walls and turrets standing in the midst of the thick, dark-green trees. Turning from the beauty of nature to human beauty, the poet imagines that a beautiful lady may be living in this castle with all her grace and loveliness and she may be the centre of attention for all the young men living in the neighbourhood.

Lines 81—90. Gist : In these lines the poet presents the picture of a peasant's cottage among the oaks : the smoke rises out of the chimney ; the woman sets the tasty meal before the small family and then goes to the field.

Hard by—close to the castle. *A cottage chimney smoaks*—smoke rises out of the chimney of a cottage. *Betwixt*—between. *Aged oaks*—old oak-trees. *Corydon and Thyrsis, met*—Corydon and Thyrsis having met : Corydon and Thyrsis together : *Corydon and Thyrsis* etc., are pastoral names of peasants. *Are at their savoury dinner*—are sitting to take their tasty meal. *Set of herbs*—consisting of herbs. *Other country messes*—other dishes common in the country. *Phillis*—another pastoral name for a peasant-girl. *Dresses*—sets ; cooks ; prepares. *The bower she leaves*—she leaves the bower or shady enclosure round the cottage. *Sheaves*—plural from sheaf which means a bundle of corn. *If the earlier season lead*—if the earlier season is going ; if it is the earlier season. *Tanned*—reddish-brown on account of heat and dryness. *Haycock*—a large heap or pile of hay (dry grass). *Mead*—meadow ; pasture-land.

Lines 91—116. Gist : The poet's attention is attracted by the small villages where bells are ringing and the young men and maids are dancing with music and the young and

old go out in the sun for sport. The merry activities go on till evening and then all the people gather round the fire and begin to tell interesting stories about the fairy Mab and the spirit called Robin Goodfellow. The young man tells the company how he got a big task done by Robin Goodfellow for the paltry reward of a bowl full of cream.

Secure delight—pleasure that is free from all possibility of harm. *The upland hamlets*—the small villages on the upland. This phrase is used in opposition to the hay-making scenes in the lower lands. *Will invite*—will attract or draw one's attention. *Merry*—cheerful; happy. *Merry bells ring round*—this phrase has been introduced by Milton as descriptive of festivity and the peal of merry bells is an accompaniment of the mirth of a village-holiday. *Jocund*—gay; merry. *Rebecks*—the *Rebeck* was a kind of fiddle or violin. *Sound to*—sing to; produce their music for. *Many a maid*—many girls. *Chequered shade*—shade which is not thick and constant but has spots and patches of light here and there. *Sometimes with secure delights . . . . in the chequered shade*. **Expl.** The country-side abounds in beautiful sights and whereas in the low-lying areas the hay-making scenes draw our attention, on the higher levels, the small villages attract our eyes and we see the innocent pleasures enjoyed by the simple people of the villages. The bells are ringing merrily and indicate the general festivity of the country-folk and the violin send out their sweet music for the delight of young men and maidens who are dancing happily in the broken shade of the trees. *Come forth*—come out to the fields. *Sunshine holiday*—sunny holiday. *Live-long*—very long. *Fail*—begins to fail or fade. *Till the live-long daylight fail*—here the poet begins to pass the night with Mirth. And he begins with the night or evening of the *sunshine holiday*, whose merriments he has just celebrated. *Spicy*—fragrant; flavoured. *Ale*—wine: a beverage composed of ale, nutmeg, sugar, toast, and roasted crabs or apples. *Feat*—trick or clever deed. *Mab*—the name of a female fairy: the queen of fairies. *Junkets*—any sweetmeat or delicacy: curds mixed with cream, sweetened and flavoured. *She was pinch'd, and pull'd she sed*—one of

the girls said or told the company that she was pinched and pulled by the fairy Mab. *He* and *she* are persons of the company assembled to spend the evening, after a country, at a rural junket. *Then to the spicy . . . . and pull'd she sed.* **Expl.** After the day's festivities the young men and maids gather together in order to enjoy the pleasant, flavoured beverage which the poet calls *spicy nut-brown ale.* It was a delectable (delightful) beverage composed of things like ale, nutmeg, sugar, toast and roasted crabs or apples. They amused one another by telling stories about the various clever tricks and deeds which they had seen or done. The girls told tales about the clever fairy Mab or one of the house-fairies who eats up the curds and creams of a dairy and they also related their personal experiences, saying that they were pinched or pulled by the same mischievous fairy or spirit, when, for example, they kept sleeping and forget to sweep the floor etc.

And he—he stands for any young man who tells the company about his own experiences. *By friars' lantern led* —led by friars' lantern. *Friars' lantern* means the will-o'-the-wisp : it is the *Jack and lantern*, which led people in the night into marshes and waters. It means anything or person who deludes or deceives people and generally leads them out of their way. In Nash's *Terrors of the Night*, the following remarks occur about these Robin-goodfellows, elfs and fairies etc. : "Then *ground they malt*, and had hempen shirts for their labour, danced in rounds in green meadows, *pinched maids* in their sleep that swept not their houses clean, and led poor travellers out of their way notoriously."

Tells how the drudging . . . . his cream bowl duly set. **Expl.** *The drudging Goblin* is Robin-Goodfellow. Some commentators on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* say the following about Robin Goodfellow : His cream-bowl was earned, and he paid the punctuality of those by whom it was duly placed for his refection (refreshment), by the service of threshing with his invisible fairy flail, in one night, and before the dawn of day, a quantity of corn in the barn, which could not have been threshed in so short a time by ten labourers. He then returns into the house

fatigued with his task; and overcharged with his reward of the cream-bowl, throws himself before the fire, and stretched along the whole breadth of the fire-place, basks till the morning. Burton speaking of these fairies, says that "a bigger kind there is of them, called with us Hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellows, that would in those superstitious times grind corn for a *messe of milke*, cut wood, or do any manner of drudgery works." *Sweet*—sweated; worked hard. *Cream-bowl*—a bowl or open vessel full of cream. *Duly set*—duly placed for the refreshment of Robin Goodfellow. *Ere glimpse of morn*—before the appearance of morning; before the dawn of day. *Shadowy flail*—invisible flail—an instrument or implement for threshing corn or for beating out grain from straw. *Hath threshed the corn*—has beaten out grain from straw. *That ten days' labourers could not end*—which ten labourers could not finish in so short a time. *And he, by friars' lantern led, ... labourers could not end.* **Expl.** The poet here touches upon the superstitions in which the old people believed. They believed, for instance, in fairies and spirits which were called domestic spirits and interfered with the every day life of the peasants. The fairy Mab would eat up creams and curds and pinch the lazy dairy maids while the Robin Goodfellows would help the peasants who gave them some fine eatables. In these lines we listen to a young man who relates his own experience before the company in the evening. He tells his companions how he was led by the *Jack and Lantern* and how the hard working Robin Goodfellow sweated in order to deserve his bowl of cream which had been placed especially for his refreshment. This spirit in one night, before the dawn of day, threshed the whole corn in the barn by means of his invisible flail. It was a task which ten labourers could not finish in so short a time.

Then lies him down the lubber fiend.—After doing his work, the lubber fiend lies him down, that is to say, lays himself down or simply lies down. *Lubber* means a clown or stupid, heavy fellow. *Fiend* means spirit; here it means the Robin Goodfellow. *Stretched out all the chimney's length*—lying along the whole breath of the fire-place. *Basks at the fire his hairy strength*—basks his hairy strength

at the fire: warms his hairy and strong body before the fire. *And crop-full out of doors he flings*—and he flings (himself) out of doors, being crop-full or filled with crop food; and he goes out of doors, fully charged or filled with his crop or reward which is a bowl of cream. *Ere the first cock his matin sings*—before the first cock sings his matin or song of the morning. *Thus done the tales . . . . soon lull'd asleep*—Thus having finished their stories, they creep or go to bed and are soon lulled (soothed) into sleep by the murmuring breezes.

Lines 117—124. Gist: The poet describes the mirthful gatherings of knights and ladies in the cities at night. There are lights, beautiful dresses and lovely ladies admired by all.

Towered cities please us then—Then, that is, at night. The poet returns from his digressions concerning the feats of fairies and goblins, which prolong the conversation over the spity bowl of a village-supper, to enumerate other pleasures or amusements of the night, or evening. *Towered cities* is a combination meaning cities which contain towers and turrets because the houses are old-fashioned. *The busy hum of men*—this phrase describes the crowded screets of the crities and the subdued noises that fill the atmosphere. Here it alludes to the particular places where men and women gather for merriment. *Throngs*—crowds: multitudes; large numbers. *Knights*—men of gentle birth, who were bred to arms (trained as soldiers) and admitted in feudal times to a certain honourable, military rank. *Baron*: in feudal times the Tenant-in-chief of the crown: a title-holder. *Bold*—enthusiastic. *Weeds of peace*—splendid dresses which are available and used in the time of peace and prosperity. *High triumphs* - grand shows, such as masks revels, etc.

Where throngs . . . . triumphs hold—where throngs of bold knights and barons hold high triumphs in weeds of peace: where large numbers of enthusiastic knights and barons enjoy their grand displays like the masks and other revels. *With store of ladies*—in the company of numerous ladies. *Whose bright eyes rain influence*—whose sparkling

eyes spread a charm everywhere. *And judge the prize of wit. or arm*—and judge the merit or worth of witty men or soldiers—the wit of the former and the bravery of the latter. *While both contend*—while both, wit and arms compete together; while the men of wit and soldiers compete together. *To win her grace, whom all commend*—to win the favour of the women whom everybody admires.

Lines 125—130. Gist: The poet invites Hymen, the god of marriage, to visit these gatherings of joy and bring all sorts of delights along with him.

Hymen—the god of marriage. *Oft*—often: frequently. *Saffron rob*—robe or dress of deep yellow colour. *Taper clear*—bright torch or light. *There let Hymen. . . . with. . . . taper clear*—gay triumphs which included masks, pageantries, spectacle and revelries accompanied by a good deal of allegoric invention were held at the marriages of noble personages. And here, of course, the classical Hymen was introduced as an actor, properly dressed, and distinguished by his characteristic symbols. He usually entered, in a saffron-coloured robe, his undervestures white, his socks yellow, a yellow veil of silk on his left arm, his head crowned with roses and marjoram (an aromatic plant), in his right hand a torch. *Pomp*—"Pomp has a peculiar and signification in some of these shows of a romantic age. But I must further observe that Milton is often learned, when it is not suspected, and that both here and in other passages he has applied *Pomp* in the appropriated sense which it bore to the Grecian festivals." *Revelry*—it means the revels, which, according to Minshen, were "sports of dancing, masking, comedies, tragedies, and such like, used in the king's house, the houses of courts, or of other great personages." *Mask*—a former kind of dramatic spectacle in which actors personified mythological deities, shepherdesses etc.: an entertainment consisting of poetic scenes, songs and dances.

Antique pageantry—The antique or ancient pageants were, at first, merely processions and emblematic spectacles at the public reception of distinguished personages. Afterwards, they are distinguished by speaking characters.

Dream—imagine. *Summer eves*—summer evenings. *Haunted stream*—stream which is haunted or visited by spirits ; hence more conducive to the working of imagination.

Lines 131—134. Gist: After these sports, the poet turns to the theatre in order to enjoy the plays of Jonson and Shakespeare.

Then to the well-trod stage anon—let us, then, turn to the well-trod stage without delay. From the other amusements like masks and pageants, the poet proceeds to the "*well-trode stage*". On this expression Mr. Warton remarks that Milton had not yet gone such extravagant lengths in puritanism as to join with certain reformers of the time in condemning the stage. *Well-trod*—means popular ; frequented or visited by people. *If Jonson's learned sock be on*—*Learned sock* means classical comedy. (The sock was a low-heeled shoe worn in Roman comedy). This expression occurs in Jonson's recommendatory verses, prefixed to the first folio edition of Shakespeare's plays in 1623. The line means—if the classical comedy of Jonson is being performed in the theatre. *Fancy's child*—the child of Fancy. Shakespeare is here called Fancy's child of Milton who shows his judgment in these lines in celebrating Shakespeare's comedies, rather than his tragedies. *Warble*—sing. *Native wood-notes wild*—wild and native (arising out of nature or natural) songs ; songs which have a certain wild and natural eloquence.

Lines 135—152. Gist: The poet seeks a refuge from the worries of life in the sweet tunes which, through their melodious rise and fall, will reveal all the hidden powers of music. This music shall be so enchanting that even Orpheus will raise his head in Paradise where he is sleeping on beds of flowers.

Against eating cares—as a safeguard against, or, to protect me from the consuming worries of life. *Lap me*—wrap me ; cover me up. *Lydian airs*—melodies of Lydia, a Greek kingdom in Asia Minor ; sweet music. *Married to immortal verse*—the sweet music is married to immortal verse ; that is to say, immortal verse is united with sweet

music ; immortal verse or poetry is musicalized or sung in sweet tunes. *Such as the meeting soul may pierce*—such as may pierce or deeply affect the meeting soul : The *meeting soul* may mean a soul which seeks communion with the spirit of Mirth through music. *Notes*—tunes ; sounds. *With many a winding bout*—with many winding bouts—a *bout* means a fold or twist ; it is often used in this sense by Spenser. *Winding bout* means curving twists. *Linked sweetness long drawn out*—continued or harmonious sweetness which is lengthened out or prolonged (in the form of a long tune). *With wanton heed and gidy cunning—Wanton heed* means wild enthusiasm or zeal and *cunning* means thrilling cunning. The word cunning is used in the same sense in *Translation of the Psalms*—"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning," the meaning of which is—"Let my fingers forget their melodious (musical) skill" *Cunning*, therefore, means musical skill in this line. *And ever, against eating cares . . . . with wanton heed and giddy cunning* : **Expl.** The cheerful man wants to forget all the consuming worries of this life by losing himself in the soft tunes and perfect and sweet music. Music fortifies him against the *eating cares*—and lifts him into a world where the soul melts in gentle notes and achieves its heavenly delight. So he wishes to be wrapped up in the gentle and sweet tunes of music which may sing out the poems of immortal beauty in notes so sweet that they may pass into the depth of the melting soul with many turns and twists of harmonious sweetness which is lengthened out with the wild enthusiasm and musical skill of the musician. These lines describe the rise and fall of the tunes which, when they are lengthened by a skilled musician, enter our souls like a stream of honey.

Through mazes running—running through mazes ; flowing and passing through the curves and twists of music. *Untwisting*—untying. *Harmony*—music. *The melting voice . . . . soul of harmony* : **Expl.** The sweet voice runs through the various ranges of music and undies or unravels the hidden soul (essence) of music. The poet is not displaying the effect of music on the senses, but the effect of a skilful musician on music. Milton's meaning is not that the senses

are enchained or amazed by music, but that, as the voice of the singer runs through the manifold mazes or intricacies of sound, all the chains are untwisted or untied which imprison and entangle the hidden soul, the essence or perfection of harmony.

That—so that. *Orpheus' self*—Orpheus himself; the very self of Orpheus. Orpheus was the son of Oeagrus and Calliope ; he had a lyre which was given to him by Apollo, and played upon it so exquisitely that all things inanimate (having no life *i.e.*, trees etc.) as well as animate were charmed. He was one of the heroes of the Argonautic expedition, and on his return married Eurydice. Later Eurydice died from the sting of a serpent and Orpheus followed her to Hades (the underworld or hell) and charmed Pluto and his associates so much that his wife was allowed to accompany him back to the earth, on the condition that he would not look back upon her (while she followed him) until the borders of Hades had been passed. The temptation of looking at her was too great and so he looked at her and lost her for ever, and she went into Pluto's clutches again. In grief for her, Orpheus spurned (hated) the women of Thrace who tore him pieces, in a Bacchic orgy (revelry). *Heave*—raise. *Golden slumber*—golden sleep. *Heaped Elysian flowers*—heaps of flowers of Elysium or paradise (Elysian means, of Elysium). Elysium according to the Greeks was the abode of the blessed after death. *Strains*—notes; songs. *Won the ear of Pluto*—the ruler of Hades or the underworld. *To have quite set free*—to the extent of having set at perfect liberty. *His half regained Eurydice*—Eurydice—the wife of Orpheus whom Orpheus, by means of his sweet music had once liberated and then lost. *That Orpheus' self may heave . . . . his half-regained Eurydice.* **Expl.** The melting voice of the singer

should produce such enchanting music that even Orpheus, on hearing it, will be roused and will raise his head from the bed of flowers in Paradise, in order to enjoy such sweet songs which would have charmed the ears of Pluto and compelled him to set Eurydice at perfect liberty, though he had liberated her once and then lost her. *Thou canst*—you can. *Mean*—intend.

II

IL'PENSEROSO

Introduction

Il'Penseroso means the pensive man or the thoughtful and gloomy man whereas *L'Allegro* means the merry and cheerful man. This poem, as already pointed out, represents Melancholy or gloomy mood, and Milton seems to have expanded and heightened some of the sentiments which he borrowed from a beautiful song on Melancholy in Beaumont and Flecher's *Nice Valor* or *Passionate Man.* "But Beaumont's melancholy is the melancholy of the swain (a peasant) ; of the mind that thinks of nature and man, but in the grove and the cottage. Milton's melancholy is that of a scholar and philosopher ; of the intellect, that has ranged the mazes of science, and that decides upon vanity and happiness, from large intercourse with man, and upon extensive knowledge and experience". It would be absurd to say that Milton was indebted to Beaumont's song for his Penseroso, but it did supply some images to his poem. "Milton's poem is among those happy works of genius, which leave a reader no choice how his mind shall be affected."

As *L'Allegro* is dedicated to the spirit of joy and Mirth, *Il'Penseroso* is dedicated to Quiet Contemplation, love of gravity, seriousness and silent musings. It would be wrong to suppose that Milton is addressing Melancholy as the spirit of sadness and grief which has a depressing effect on the soul. Under the influence of the Melancholy which Milton wants to induce, the soul advances forward in Wisdom and Philosophy, shuns cheap optimism and light-hearted joys. It is a mood of protest against revelry and merry-making. If there is a sadness at all in this mood it is the sadness of the soul that aspires to achieve the highest

things and not of the man who seeks carnal pleasures and feels disappointed after too much of self-indulgence.

The picture of the goddess of Melancholy which Milton creates is extremely noble and has an ennobling influence. A man who has come under sway must regulate his life strictly and must be a self-controlled person. He must be the happiest of mortals because he enjoys a peace of mind, a contentment and stoic temper which ordinary men do not have. She is a pure spirit and Milton gives her the name of a pensive man, devout and pure, and in temper she is sober, steadfast, and demure. Her companions are Peace and Quiet, Spare Fast, Retired Leisure, Contemplation and Silence. Such a spirit must lead a soul to spiritual advancement.

The activities mentioned by the poet in which he wants his soul to be absorbed cover a wide range. He would be deeply interested in philosophy and pay his homage to Plato; he would make a study of the heavens and look at the orbits of the stars as the great Hermes, the mythical Egyptian astronomer, once did; and he would enjoy the Great classics of the past, particularly the tragedies of the Greeks, the Elizabethans and the later English dramatists. He is keen to enjoy the poetry of Chaucer and Spenser. He yearns for a quiet contemplative mood and seeks a shelter safe from the penetrating light of the dawn—a shadowy seat among the pines and asks, where he might be awakened by a divine music sent by the Unseen Genius of the wood. Above all, his soul desires to attain the heavenly bliss which is the privilege of the few gifted souls, whole and pure, whose earthly existence is in accordance with the Divine will. Thus, it is an invocation to the highest Deity of culture, religion, morality and self discipline. Under its influence he can shape his life in an ideal manner. on a most high intellectual and moral plane.

Brooke compares these two poems with Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and remarks that "the merits of these poems are curiously like those of the famous *Elegy* of that other London scrivener's son. Thomas Gray, who, if he had lived a century earlier, would have

been Milton's near neighbour in Buckinghamshire. Milton lacks the special "graveyard" interest and strain of sentimentality; his vignettes (portraits) are sharper, but, like Gray's, they express the reflections of a bookish man in pastoral scenery with a supreme felicity. Marvel may sometimes have approached perfection in this genre (kind of poetry), but few others, surely, in English poetry."

Legouis points out the literary beauties of the two poems in the following words: "These two poems, which, contain altogether 328 short lines are filled to overflowing with the results of accurate observations and are an inexhaustible lesson in art. At the same time they display the whole of Milton's register, the extreme notes of the gamut (the whole series of notes) of his feelings at this time. The register is short; it excludes sin, evil and pain, hardly includes mankind except as a passing spectacle, and has no place for any feeling which is not both very pure and very egoistical—the intimate pleasures of contemplation and study. Milton's soul held, as shall be seen, what was greater and better than this: he was capable of sublimity, devotion to a cause, and submission to great sacrifice. The theme of *L'Allegro* and *Il'Penseroso* is merely, on the last analysis, the search for the pleasures to which he was most susceptible and his final preference is for the most solitary and unsociable of them, for melancholy. Curiously he excludes love from his sources of felicity. This young man of twenty-five had turned his gaze heavenward and almost dreamt of a hermit's cell. Even in *L'Allegro*, there is only one, and the vaguest, allusion to a fair lady living in a neighbouring castle 'bosomed high in tufted trees'.

[*Note* :—The last paragraph can be equally quoted in the critical appreciation of *L'Allegro*].

IL'PENSEROSO

HENCE, vain deluding Joys,
  The brood of Folly without father bred!
How little you bested,
  Or fill the fixed mind with all your tops!
Dwell in some idle brain,

  And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
As thick and numberless
  As the gay motes that people the sun-beams,
Or likest hovering dreams,
  The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train.

But hail! thou Goddess sage and holy!
Hail! divinest Melancholy!
Whose saintly visage is too bright
To hit the sense of human sight,
And therefore to our weaker view

O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue
Black, but such as in esteem
Prince Memnon's sister might beseem,
Or that starred Ethiop queen that strove
To set her beauty's praise above

The sea nymphs, and their powers offended.
Yet thou art higher far descended:
Thee bright-haired Vesta long of yore
To solitary Saturn bore;
His daughter she (in Saturn's reign

Such mixture was not held a stain)·
Oft in glimmering bowers and glades
He met her, and in secret shades

Paraphrase

Lines 1—10. Go away, O fruitless, deceitful Joys; you are the children of Folly (silliness of mind) born without a father. You are of no avail and can do nothing except fill an inactive or idle drain with all your petty joys. Go, and live in some idle mind in the company of foolish whims (ideas) with showy forms which are as thick and countless as the bright particles of dust that crowd together in the rays of the sun: or they are as numberless as the prevailing dreams which are the inconstant followers of the procession of Morpheus (the god of sleep and dreams).

Lines 11—22. But welcome, O wise and purehearted goddess: welcome, O most holy Melancholy! Your holy countenance (face) is so bright that the limited human sight cannot bear to see it: therefore, to the weak and crude vision of the human beings, your face seems to be covered with black which is the symbolic colour of sober wisdom. But this black colour is such that it might become or be worthy of the sister of Prince Memnon of Ethiopia in all her dignity: or it might be a fit colour for the black Queen of Ethiopia whose body was marked with stars and who tried to prove herself more beautiful than the Nereids (sea-fairies) and thus provoked their anger.

Lines 23—30. Though the queen of Ethiopia might match you in colour, yet in origin, you are of a far higher birth than she. The bright-haired Vesta (goddess of the hearth or fireplace) gave birth to you, long ago, as a result of her union with the gloomy Saturn (the ancient Roman god of Agriculture). And she (Vesta) was the daughter of Saturn as well as his wife, because during the reign or rule of Saturn, such a union was not considered to be a sin. He met her frequently in the dim, shady enclosures and

Of woody Ida's inmost grove.
Whilst yet there was no fear of Jove.

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestic train,
And sable stole of cypress lawn
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.
Come, but keep thy wonted state,
With even step, and musing gait,
And looks commercing with the skies,
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:
There held in holy passion still,
Forget thyself to marble, till
With a sad leaden downward cast
Thou fix them on the earth as fast.
And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,
Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,
And hears the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing.
And add to these retired Leisure,
That in trim gardens takes his pleasure;
But, first and chiefest, with thee bring
Him that yon soars on golden wing,
Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,
The Cherub Contemplation:
And mute Silence hist along,
'Less Philomel will deign a song,
In her sweetest saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of Night,

open spaces and in the hidden glooms (dark places) of the farthest avenues of the forest-covered Ida (a mountain in Crete, where Jove was brought up) in the days when there was no fear of Jove, had not yet been born.

Lines 31—36. Come, O thoughtful Nun, who are so pious and pure, calm, steady and modest, dressed all over in clothes of the darkest colour, trailing (drawing along the ground) a majestic train behind you with your modest shoulders covered by a black veil of thin, transparent, black lawn (fine linen).

Lines 37—48. Come, O Spirit of Melancholy, maintaining your customary (usual) dignity and walking thoughtfully at a steady and regular pace, with your looks turned upward and holding intercourse with the heavens, are your ravished (absorbed) soul appearing in the calmness of your eyes. In this condition, remaining still under the spell (effect) of pious zeal, forget yourself in meditation to such an extent that you may appear like a statue of marble (a stone) till, when the ecstasy is over, you fix your eyes on the earth with a sad and downcast look.

Lines 45—48. Let Calm, Peace and Quiet join with you : and let the lean Fast (personification of abstinence from food for some holy purpose) which aften feeds itself along with the gods and hears the Muses (goddesses of poetry) singing round about the altar of Jove in a ring, jon with you.

Lines 49—60. Add to these (that is, Peace, Quiet and Fast) the idle Leisure which takes its delight or joy in nicely-shaped gardens. But first and foremost of all, bring with you the Cherub Contemplation (personification of thought in the form of an angel) who flies sublime on golden wings or takes a high and glorious flight guiding the fiery-wheeled throne, or carrying bright ideas of deity along with it. And beckon the dumb Silence (personification of silence) to follow you, unless Philomel (Philomela or the nightingale) will do the favour of singing a song in her sweetest and most melancholy state, softening the roughness of the night

While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke
Gently o'er the accustomed oak,
Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly.
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee, chauntress, oft the woods among
I woo, to hear thy even-song;
And, missing thee, I walk unseen
On the dry smooth-shaven green,
To behold the wandering moon,
Riding near her highest noon.
Like one that had been led astray
Through the Heaven's wide pathless way,
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.
Oft, on a plat of rising ground,
I hear the far-off curfew sound,
Over some wide-watered shore
Swinging slow with sullen roar;
Or, if the air will not permit,
Some still removed place will fit,
Where glowing embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom,
Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth,
Or the bellman's drowsy charm
To bless the doors from nightly harm.
Or let my lamp at midnight hour
Be seen in some high lonely tower,
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,
With thrice great Hermes, or unsphere
The spirit of Plato to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook;
And of those daemons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
Whose power hath a true consent
With planet, or with element.

while Cynthia (the Moon) restrains or stops her pair of dragons gently over the customary oak-tree in order to hear her song.

Lines 61—72. O sweet bird, who avoid the din of foolish activities, O most melodious and gloomy spirit of Melancholy ; O sweet songstress (female singer), often among the gloomy forests, I seek to hear your eveningsong : and feeling your absence, I walk alone on the dry, smoothly-cut green grass, in order to enjoy the sight of the wandering moon which is moving near the highest point in the sky like one who has been led out of the right way through the wide and unmarked road of heaven. And often it appears as if the Moon is bending down her head in order to come down through a fleecy (wool-like) cloud.

Lines 73—84. Often I stand on a piece of rising ground, and hear the sound of the Curfew (in feudal times, the ringing of bell at eight o'clock as a signal to put out all fires and lights) prevailing over some wide-watered shore and vibrating slowly with a dull and gloomy tone. Or, if the wind does not permit me to stand on a piece of rising ground, some quiet, remote or unfrequented place will suit my purpose where the bright remains of a dying fire produce a sort of false twilight in the room. This place should be far away from all joyful societies of men and no sound may be heard here except the continued song the cricket (an insect) near the fireplace or the sleepy cry of the watchman, so that all harmful elements may be kept from the doors of the cottage.

Lines 95—96. Or let my lamp be seen burning at the time of midnight in some lonely and high tower where I may often keep awake even after the disappearance of the Bear (name of group of stars) like the great astronomer Hermes or disturb the soul of Plato (a great Greek Philosopher) ,in order to discover all those worlds and extensive regions of thought which surround his imperishable soul that has, long ago, left its earthly home in this world and I shall try to know all about those spirits which are found in fire, air, water or in the earth and have power enough to control this earth and all the various elements.

Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by.
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine,

Or what (though rare) of later age
Ennobled hath the buskined stage.
But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musaeus from his bower,
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing

Such notes as warbled to the string
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made Hell grant what Love did seek.
Or call up him that left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold,

Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That owned the virtuous ring and glass,
And of the wondrous horse of brass
On which the Tartar king did ride;

And if aught else great bards beside
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
Of turneys, and of trophies hung,
Of forests, and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear.

Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,
Till civil-suited Morn appear,
Not tricked and frounced, as she was wont
With the Attic boy to hunt.
But kerchieft in a comely cloud,

While rocking winds are piping loud,
Or ushered with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the rustling leaves
With minute-drops from off the eaves.

Lines 97 —102.Sometime, let splendid Tragedy, dressed in royal robes, come at a stately pace, presenting the legend (story) of Thebes or the story of holy Troy (an ancient city) or showing a few glimpses of Shakespeare, who, in a later period, has elevated or raised Tragedy to a high status.

Lines 103—108. But O gloomy Virgin (Melancholy, I wish that your power could raise Musaeus (a Greek poet) from his chamber of eternal rest or persuade the soul of Orpheus (an ancient musician) to sing such sweet songs which, in accompaniment with the music of the lyre, made the tears to flow down the cheeks of the hard-hearted Pluto and compelled the master of Hell (Pluto) to grant the desire of love.

Lines 108—120. Or I wish that you could call up the soul of Chaucer (an English poet) who left unfinished the story of the brave Combuscan (the Squire's tale in Chaucer's *Conterbury Tales*), of Camball and of Algarsife and of the man whose wife was Canace who possessed the ring and glass of virtue, and the story of the wonderful horse of metal on which rode the Tartar king. In addition to this, I wish, you could bring up before me all those songs, which the great poets have sung in well-balanced and dignified stanzas about tournaments and the trophies of knightly valour (bravery) about the fictitious forests and terrific magic arts in which the real meaning is much deeper than the obvious sense that meets the ear.

Lines 121—130. O Night while you are passing with your darkness, see me often in a world of ideas and romance as described above, till the gravely-robed Morn (Aurora) appears, not dressed and excessively decorated as she usually is when hunting along with the Attick boy (a youth) named Cephalus who was loved by Aurora—the dawn-goddess but wrapped in a graceful cloud while the swaying winds are moaning aloud. Or the Morn should be preceded or accompanied by a gentle shower of rain, after the wind has blown its hardest and subsided, and when the rain finishes, the drops of water fall from the projecting edges of the roof after short intervals, on the rustling leaves below.

And when the sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring
To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves,
Of pine, or monumental oak,
Where the rude axe with heaved stroke
Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hollowed haunt.
There in close covert by some brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eye,
While the bee with honied thigh,
That at her flowery work doth sing,
And the waters murmuring,
With such consort as they keep.
Entice the dewy-feathered Sleep.
And let some strange mysterious dream
Wave at his wings in airy stream
Of lively portraiture displayed,
Softly on my eyelids laid ;
And, as I wake, sweet music breathe
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some Spirit to mortals good,
Or the unseen Genius of the wood.
But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high embowed roof,
With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.
There let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.

Lines 131—138. And when the sun appears from behind the clouds and begins to throw its hot and bright rays over the world, O goddess (Melancholy) take me to the arched avenues of some dark and gloomy forests and the brown shadows of pine-trees or the extensive (huge) oak-trees which are loved by Sylvanus, the god of woods, where the cruel axe of the wood-cutter was never heard to frighten the Nymphs (fairies of the woods) with its loud stroke or to scare them to leave their sacred groves.

Lines 139—150. There, in some remote, secret place by the side of a stream where no impious eye may see me, hide me from the piercing light of the day while the bee which is laden with honey and sings at her flowery work, and the sounding waters with such tunes as they produce, induce the cool and refreshing Sleep to come over me. And let some strange and fantastic Dream put the wings of Sleep in motion, which shall be displayed, or expended, in an airy or soft stream of lifelike or vivid images, gently falling or settling on my eye-lides.

Lines 151—154. And as I wake from my sleep, let sweet music come into my ears from above, around and under me, sent by some heavenly power or by some invisible presiding spirit of the forest only to pious men.

Lines 155—160. But let my dutiful feet never forget to walk with religious zeal in the dim enclosures of a monastery or church and may I never forget to love the arched roof supported by the huge strength of old pillars, and the windows which, being richly decorated with painted histories, throw a dim and holy light in the interior of the church.

Lines 161—166. Here, let the loud organ (a musical instrument) send out its sounds in response to the youthful band of singers below in such devotional music and sacred song which may infuse sweetness, through my ears, into my soul and melt it in sweet spiritutal delight so that I may begin to see all the beauties and joys of heaven laid bare before my eyes.

And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage.
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell

Of every star that Heaven doth shew,
And every herb that sips the dew ;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.
These pleasures, Melancholy, give,

And I with thee will choose to live.

Lines 167—174. And I pray that in my old age I may find a peaceful, retired place where I may put on the customary hairy gown of a hermit and, sitting in a mossy cave, may study all the stars displayed by the heaven and all the plants which feed themselves on the dew, till my experience and knowledge grow so extensive or vast that I can make prophetic utterances about the future.

Lines 175—176. Give me all the above-mentioned pleasures, O Melancholy, and I will decide to live always with you.

IL'PENSEROSO

Notes and Explanations

Il'Penseroso—The pensive man ; thoughtful and gloomy man.

Lines 1—10. Gist : The poet bids the vain joys to leave him. He calls them children of Folly, born without a father, and asks them to live in some idle mind filled with useless fancies and dreams.

Hence—be off, go away. *Vain*—worthless ; fruitless, idle, silly. *Deluding*—deceitful ; unreliable. *The brood*—the family ; the children *Folly*—silliness. The poet personifies sillinese who is thus the mother of vain joys. *Without Father bred*—bred or born without father. This phrase throws contempt at the parentage of idle joys which are born without a father. *Bested*—avail ; benefit ; are valuable. *How little you bested* - you are of little service or value to man. *Fixed mind*—inactive or idle mind. *Toys*—the little joys or pleasures. *Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys*—You are of little use to man. The only thing which you can do is to fill an idle broin with the little, pretty pleasures which you bring with yourselves. The spirit of joy or cheerfulness becomes something contemptible in the eyes of the man who is given to moods of melancholy. In such moments our laughters and gay smiles seem to be vain things having no substance like an empty bubble. The

joys are little, fruitless things unwelcome to the mind which luxuriates in melancholy.

Dweel—live. *Fancies fond*—fond fancies—foolish whims or ideas. *Gaudy*—showy : attractive in appearance. *Numberless*—countless. *Gay*—bright. *Motes*—particles of dust : little specks of dust or matter. *People*—inhabit, live in : fill. *Sunbeams*—the beams of rays of the sun. *Or likest*—or they are numberless like. *Hovering dreams*—dreams that fly or prevail here and there. *Fickle*—transitory : perpetually shifting ; inconstant. *Pensioners*—followers. *Morpheus*—a god of sleep and dreams. *Train*—procession. *Dwell in some idle brain . . . . pensioners of Morpheus' train.* **Expl.** The melancholy man does not want the futile joys which the spirit of mirth may bring to him. His is a gloomy mind that avoids the silly pleasure of moment. Therefore he bids the vain enjoy to live in some idle brain in the company of other foolish whims and delightful, showy forms which are as thick and countless as the specks of dust in the rays of the sun. The small particles are often seen dancing brightly in the rays of the sun : they are numerous : in the same way an idle brain is filled with countless fancies, dreams and joys. The second comparison is with the numberless, hovering dreams which are inconstant and changeable and the god of Sleep in an endless procession. The dreams are called "the fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train" as they attend upon the god of Sleep and are always changing.

Lines 11—22. Gist : These lines are addressed to the most holy goddess of Melancholy. The poet welcomes her and says that her face appears dark to the grossness of human visions, although in reality it is excessively bright. Black, he says, is the symbolic colour of wisdom and her black colour is graceful enough to become the sister of Memnon or the Queen of Ethiopia.

Hail—welcome. *Sage* — wise. *Holy* — pure-hearted. Melancholy is called sage, as night was called by the Greeks, both, night and melancholy-being favourable to wisdom and contemplation. *Divinest*—most divine : most holy. *Saintly*—holy : pure : virtuous. *Visage*—countenance : face.

Too bright to hit the sense of human sights—so excessively bright that the gross human sight or vision cannot bear to look at it. The countenance of Melancholy is in reality of excessive lustre but it appears dark to the grossness of human vision. The *bright visage* was therefore *overlaid* with black according to its visible appearance. *To our weaker view*—to our weaker sight or vision or eyes. *O'erlaid with black*—covered with black. *Staid*—sober: self-possessed: sedate: calm. *Wisdom*—the personification of wisdom. *Hue* colour. *But hail, thou goddess . . . . staid Wisdom's hue*. **Expl.** The poet welcomes Melancholy whom he calls the most wise and holy goddess. He describes the saintly appearance of Melancholy as excessively bright in reality toned down into a sober black colour so that the weaker vision of man may not be blinded or dazzled by it. This black colour, he says, is the symbolic colour of sober wisdom. Wisdom, Night and Melancholy all three seem to be closely associated with one another and all are conducive to thinking.

Esteem—worthiness. *Prince Memnon's sister*:—The whole phrase means, an Ethiopian Princess or a sable (dark) beauty. Memnon was a king of Ethiopia but it does not appear that he had any sister. Therefore, this lady is a creation of the poet. It means, however, an Ethiopian princess. Ethiopians are a black coloured people: the princess, too, must be black but she must be possessing a beauty and dignity of her own. Hence the comparison between the colour of Melancholy and the Ethiopian princess. *Beseem*—become: be worthy of. *Starred Ethiop queen*—Cassiope, as we learn from Apollodorus, was the wife of Cepheus, king of Ethiopia. She boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nercids, (sea fairies) and so she challenged them to a trial. The Nercids in revenge persuaded Neptune (the god of the Sea) to send a huge whale into Ethiopia. To appease them, Cassiope was directed a expose her daughter Andromeda to the monster (whale): but Perseus (a fabbled Greek hero) rescued Andromeda whom he loved, and carried Cassiope into heaven, where she became a constellation. Hence she is called *that Starred Ethiop queen*. But Milton seems to have been struck with

an old Gothic print of the constellations, where this queen is represented with white stars. *Strove*—tried. *To set her beauty's praise above*—to prove her beauty to be greater than. *The Sea-Nymphs*—the Nereids or sea fairies. *And their powers offended*—and thus she offended their powers or provoked their anger.

Black, but such as in esteem : . . . and their powers offended. **Expl.** The bright face of Melancholy is covered with black but this black colour is of such dignity that it might be worthy of an Ethiopian princess or of that beautiful though black queeen of Ethiopia (Cassiope by name) whose body was covered all over with stars and who felt so proud of her own beauty that she challenged the sea-fairies to a contest in beauty. The sea fairies were offended when she tried to prove herself more beautiful than themselves and so they tried to take revenge with the help of Neptune. Cassiope, according to the legend, was carried to heaven and there she was changed into a constellation. She is called the starred queen because in an old Greek print Milton saw her black body covered with stars. **Lines 17—18. Prose order.** Black, but such as in esteem, might beseem prince Memnon's sister.

Lines 23—30. Gist : Though equal to the Ethiopian queen in colour, Melancholy is superior to her in birth. She is the daughter of Vesta and Saturn and Vesta was not only the daughter of Saturn but also his wife. Their union took place in the forests of Ida.

Yet thou art higher far descended—Yet you have a far higher ancestory than the queen of Ethiopia or you are of a birth very much higher than the birth of the Ethiopian queen. *Vesta*—goddess of the hearth or fireplace. *Long of yore*—long ago, in ancient times. *Solitary*—lonely, gloomy. *Saturn*—the oldest divinity (god) of the Roman mythology and supposed to be the god of Agriculture. With him is identified the Greek Cronus, a son of Uranus and Terra, who usurped his father's kingdom, his brothers' assenting on condition that he did not bring up any male children. Saturn therefore always devoured his sons as soon as they were born, but his wife Rhea, concealed from

her husband his sons, Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto, and gave him large stones to swallow instead of her sons. It was this that led, to the Titans (a race of giants) making war upon Saturn and his ultimate overthrow by his son Jupiter. *Bore*—gave birth to. *Thee bright-haired Vesta . . . . Saturn bore*: Prose order of these lines is:—Long of yore, bright-haired Vesta bore thee to solitary Saturn. It means: Long ago in the remote times the bright-haired Vesta gave birth to you as a result of her union with the lovely Saturn. **Note.** The meaning of Milton in thus describing the origin of Melancholy is, that Melancholy is the daughter of Genius, which is typified by the bright-haired goddess of the eternal fire. Saturn, the father, is the god of Saturnine dispositions, of pensive and gloomy mind. *His daughter she . . . . she*—(Vesta) was also his daughter. *Reign*—rule or the period of sovereignty. *Such mixture*—such union: that is, union between father and daughter as between Saturn and Vesta. *Was not held a stain*—was not considered to be a blemish or sin. *In Saturn's reign . . . . held a stain*—during the period of Saturn's sovereignty or rule such a union as took place between Saturn and Vesta who were father and daughter respectively, was not considered unlawful. It was permissible.

Oft—often: frequently. *Glimmering*—dimly lit. *Bowers*—shady enclosures in the forest. *Glades*—open spaces in the wood. *Secret shades*—dark and hidden nooks. *Woody*—covered with wood: forest. *Ida*—a mountain in Crete where Jove or Jupiter was brought up. *Inmost grove*—farthest grove of cluster of trees. *Whilst yet*—while still. *There was no fear of Jove*—there was no fear of Jove or Jupiter who later on grew up and overthrew his own father, Saturn. Jove was the son of Saturn and Rhea, and was the lord of heaven and father of gods and men. He was brought up in a caue on Mount Ida to hide him from his father (Saturn), who had eaten the rest of his children, and while he was still a child, he conquered the Titans. Thus he became master of the world, and after giving the empire of the sea to Neptune and that of the internal regions, installed himself as king of heaven. He is usually depicted seated on a throne, with thunder-bolts in one

hand ready to be hurled against his enemies, and a sceptre of cypress in the other hand, wearing a wreath of olive or myrtle.

Lines 31—36. Gist: The poet invites Melancholy to come in her robes of a sober, black colour.

Pensive—thoughtful and gloomy. *Nun* - a female who secludes herself in a religious house to give her time to devotion. The poet calls Melancholy a Nun. *Devout*—pious. *Sober*—calm. *Steadfast*—steady. *Demure*—modest: quiet. *Robe*—dress: garment. *Grain*—colour: hue. *Flowing with*—followed by. *Majestick train*—majestic train: train means the part of dress which trails behind the wearer. Majestic train means the train that shows the dignity or majesty of royal personalities. *Sable stole*—black stole. Here is a character and propriety in the use of the *stole*, which, in the poetical phraseology of the present day, is not only perpetually missapplied, but misrepresented. *Stole* - was a veil which, covered the head andshoulders and it was worn only by such of the Roman matrons as were distinguished for the strictness of their modesty. *Cyprus lawn*—Cyprus is a thin, transparent texture or cloth. Lawn also means a thin or fine linen. Both the words mean a fine, thin cloth. *Over thy decent shoulders drawn*—drawn over your modest shoulders. The shoulders are called decent because they are not exposed.

Lines 37—48. Gist: Come, O Melancholy, walking thoughtfully and steadily. Your eyes are fixed at the high heavens and you appear as calm as a statue. But soon again you look down towards the earth with gloomy eyes, when your ecstasy is over. Let Peace and Quiet and Fast join you as you come to me.

Wonted—usual. *Keep thy wonted state*—maintain your customary dignity. *To keep state*—seems to have been anciently a familiar phrase and combination. *Even step*—regular pace. *Musing gait*—pensive or thoughtful way of walking. *Come, but keep . . . . and musing gait*—Come, O goddess Melancholy, but though I am impatient for your arrival, I wish you to come to me with your customary

(usual) dignity, walking steadily at a thoughtful pace. The close relationship between thoughtfulness and melancholy should be marked. Joys are often thoughtless but Melancholy is pensive.

Commercing with the skies—holding commerce or intercourse with the heavens : communing with the skies. *Rapt soul*—ravished soul : soul that is filled with ecstacy or pious zeal and joy. *Sitting in thine eyes*—appearing in the expression of your eyes. *Hell in holly passion still*—all the time under the influence of pious zeal or enthusiasm. *Forget thyself to marble*—forget yourself in such excessive thoughtfulness that you may appear like a marble-statue—petrified or fixed in a thoughtful mood. *Leaden*—heavy. *Downward cast*—drooping glance : downcast or gloomy look. *Fix them*—fix your eyes. *As fast*—quickly. *And looks commercing with the skies . . . . on the earth as fast.* **Expl.** The poet asks Melancholy to come to him with her usual dignified gait while her eyes are fixed on the heavens and seem to be holding perpetual communion with the skies. Her soul which is lost in a deep ecstacy or pious pleasure appears through the calmness of her eyes. The goddess is under such a deep influence of pious zeal that she loses herself in a world of thought, and is fixed in one thinking mood. She seems to be petrified (fixed) in this pensive mood and appears like a statue of marble which stands calm and motionless. And when this ecstacy of communion with heavens is over, she turns her calm eyes from the skies and fixes them gloomily on the earth again. The expression of her eyes now is sad because the fit of heavenly rapture delight is over.

Peace, Quiet and Fast—these are the personifications of peace, calmness and fast. *Fast*—means abstinence from food for some holy purpose. *Spare*—lean. *Of*—often. *With gods doth diet*—doth diet with gods : does diet with gods : diets or dines with gods. *Muses*—the nine goddesses of poetry, music, and other liberal arts—daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne the following are the names of the goddesses :—*Calliope*—goddess of epic poetry ; *Clio*, of history; *Erato*, of amatory poetry ; *Euterpe*, of lyric poetry ;

Melpomene, of tragedy; *Polyhymnia*, of lyric poetry and eloquence, *Terpsichore*, of dancing; *Thalia*, of comedy and *Urania*, the goddess of astronomy. *Aye*—ever. *Jove*—son of Saturn and Rhea, the lord of heaven and father of gods and men. *Alter*—an elevated place or structure, block or stone, or the like, on which sacrifices were anciently offered. Here, the reference is to the special altar consecrated to Jove, or Jupiter.

Lines 49—60. Gist: The poet wishes that Melancholy should be accompanied by Leisure, Contemplation and Silence also. And if Philomel will sing her sweet songs, so much the better: even the moon will derive a gentle pleasure from her soft music.

Retired—secluded. *Leisure*—freedom from occupation: ease. This, too, is the personification of leisure. *That in trim gardens taken his pleasure*—that who takes his pleasure in trim garden: who enjoys his free time in nicely-cut and shaped garden. It has been remarked by Mr. Warton that affection and false elegance were now carried to the most elaborate and absurd excess in gardening, and he notices, among similar monuments of extravagance in other countries, "the garden at Hampton Court, where in print, are figured various animals, the royal arms of England, and many other things." A trim garden, therefore, mean a garden in which the plants and hedges have been cut in the most fashionable pattern. In Lahore, the *Gulistan-i-Fatimah* park in Jinnah Gardens may be taken as an example. *First and chiefest*—first and foremost. *With thee bring*—bring with you. *Him that yon soars*—him who flies high. *Him* stands for the Cherub Contemplation. *Fiery-wheeled throne*—the glorious ideas of divinity. *The cherub contemplation*:—By contemplation, is here meant that stretch of thought by which the human mind rises "to the first good, first perfect and first fair": and is, therefore, very properly said to soar (fly) *on golden-wing guiding the fiery-wheeled throne*; that is, to take a high and glorious flight, carrying the bright ideas of deity along with it. Milton describes contemplation under the image of a Cherub—a winged creature with a human face, represented as associated with Jehovah, especially drawing his chariot throne. But Spenser describes

contemplation of a more sedate turn, and intent only on human things, under the figure of an *old man*; because time and experience qualify men for thinking. Spenser might be right on his imagery; and yet Milton might be right in his, without being supposed to ramble after some *fanciful Italian*. *But first and chiefest . . . . the cherub contemplation*: But first and foremost of all, bring with you the cherub contemplation who flies sublime on golden wings or takes a high and glorious flight, guiding the fiery-wheeled throne, or carrying bright ideas of deity along with it.'

Mute—dumb: speechless. *Hist*—beckon: make a sign to. *And the mute Silent hist along*—and hist along the mute Silence: and make a sign to the dumb Silence to follow you: and let dumb Silence come along with you. *'Less*—unless. *Philomel*—or Philomela—the nightingale. Philomela was daughter of Padion, king of Athens; and she was changed into a nightingale or swallow. The story tells us that her sister Procne, having married Tereus, king of Thrace, pined for the companionship of Philomela. Tereus obtained permission to conduct Philomela to her sister but he became enamoured of her on the way, and after having offered violence to her, cut off her tongue that she might not be able to discover his ill-usage, and hid her in a lonely place. He then told Procne that her sister was dead. But Philomela, during her captivity, depicted her misfortunes on a piece of tapestry and privately conveyed this to Procne, who delivered her and planned with her how they should be avenged on Tereus. Procne, accordingly, murdered her son Itys and served up his flesh to Tereus at a dinner. Tereus came to know all this and drew his sword to punish Procne and Philomela, but at that moment he was changed into a hoopoe, Philomela into nightingale. Procne into a swallow and Itys into a Pheasant.

Will deign a song—will do the favour of singing a song. *Saddest plight*—gloomiest condition. *Smoothing*—making smooth or even. *Rugged*—rough: irregular. *Brow*—face or appearance. *Cynthia*—the Moon. *Checks*—restrains: controls the speed of. *Dragon yoke*—pair of dragons carrying or dragging the chariot of Cynthia. Dragon means a

fabulous winged reptile. Reptile is an animal that moves or crawls on its belly or with short legs.

And the mute Silence hist along . . . . gently ov'r the accustomed oak :– And beckon the mute Silence to come along with you, so that your thoughtfulness may grow deeper. But if Philomela is good enough to sing a song in her sweet and sorrowful voice, let her do so because her gentle song, and mellow voice will have a soothing effect on everything. It will soften down the roughness of the night and even Cynthia will be so charmed by the song that she will restrain the speed of her chariot gently above the customary oak, in order to enjoy its sweetness.

Lines 61—72. Gist: The poet says to Melancholy: "O sweet songstress, I often try to hear your evening-song among the dark forests and not finding you there, I walk out into the open and enjoy the sight of the lovely moon which seems to have lost its way in the sky.

That shunn'st—who shun : who avoid. *The noise of folly*—the noise or din caused by foolish and vain activities. *Musical* — melodious. *Melancholy* — gloomy and quiet. *Chauntress*—congstress ; female singer. *The woods among*—among the woods or forests. *Woo*—seek. *Even song*—evening song. *Thee chauntress . . . . thy even-song* : Prose order : Chauntress, I oft woo thee among the woods to hear thy, even-song :—O sweet songstress, I often seek you among the forests in order to hear your evening-song. *Note* : *L'Allegro* began with the morning of the day, and the livey salutations of the lark. *Il'Penseroso*, with equal propriety after the introductory part of the poem, opens with the night : with moonshine, and the melancholy music of the nightingale. *Missing thee*—not finding you there ; feeling your absence. *I walk unseen* : I walk secretly, so that no one may be near about to see me. *Note* : In the case of *L'Allegro*, he walks *not unseen*, that is, in the open, because the cheerful man does not need any seclusion : he shares his joy with others. Here, the melancholy man walks unseen, avoiding the eyes of other men, lost in a world of his own where gloom and contemplation reign supreme. *Smooth shaven green*—grass that has been cut so that the

surface appears smoot and even. *Behold*—see : watch. *Wandering moon*—the moon is called a wanderer of the skies. We remember Shelley's lines :

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth,
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy ?

Riding near the highest noon :—moving near the highest point of the sky or the zenith. *Led astray*—led out of the right way. *Pathless way*—undefined or unmarked road. *As if her head she bow'd*—as if she bowed or bent down her head. *Stooping through a fleecy cloud*—trying to descend or come down through the clouds which look like fleece or wool. *And oft, as if her head . . . . through a fleecy cloud* :—Here is a description at once poetically picturesque (beautiful), and strictly natural ; the moon having the appearance of positive descent (coming down), as the kind of clouds here described break and disperse around her.

Lines 73—84. Gist : The poet often stands on a mound to hear the evening bell ringing in the distance or he wishes for a secluded, dusky cottage where no sound except that of the cricket or watchman may be heard during the night.

Oft—often. *Plat*—piece. *Plat of rising ground*—mound or hillock. *Far-off*—distant. *Curfeu*—in feudal times, the ringing of a bell at eight o'clock as a signal to put out all the fires and lights. *I hear the far off curfeu sound*—I hear the distant sound of the curfeu. *Wide-water'd shore*—shore or coastal region bordered or covered by wide waters. *Swinging slow*—ringing or vibrating slowly. *Sullen roar*—dull and gloomy tone or sound. *If the air will not permit*—if the air is blowing so fiercely that it does not allow me to stand on a hillock. *Still*—quiet. *Removed*—removed or unfrequented. *Will fit*—will suit my purpose. *Some still . . . . will fit*—some quiet, remote, or unfrequented place

will suit my purpose. *Glowing*—shining; bright. *Embers*—live pieces of coal or wood: smouldering remains of a fire. *To counterfeit a gloom*—to intimate darkness or twilight: to produce a sort of false twilight. *Far from*—removed from. *All resort of mirth*—all haunts of joy: all joyful societies of men. *Save*—except. *Cricket*—an insect, allied to grass-hoopers and locusts. *Hearth*—fire-place. *Belman*—watch-man or, in ancient times, a man who not only cried or announced the hours, but also used benedictions in order to secure the inhabited places from the evils of the night. *Drowsy charm*—benedictions or words of prayer uttered in sleepy tone by the watchman. *To bless the doors from nightly harm*—it was a superstition in old days that the evils of the night could be kept away by the belman if he would recite some charm from time to time during the night. And so the place could be protected by means of benediction like the following:—

"From fairies, and the tempters of the night,
Guard me, beseech ye!"

or

"From noise of scare-fires rest ye free,
From murder, *Benedicite*!
From all mischances, that may fright,
Your pleasing slumbers in the night,
Mercie secure ye all, and keep
The goblin from ye while ye sleep, etc."

Or if the air will not permit . . . . to bless the doors from nightly harm. **Expl.** The poet, in these lines, wishes for a solitary, secluded place where he may spend the night in the silent twilight of a room, lit by the dying cools of a fire. In the preceding lines he shows his desire to stand on the top of a mound in the evening and hear the distant, dull sound of the evening bell. But now he says that in case the wind does not allow him to stand thus on a hillock, he will choose some quiet and remote place which suits the gloom of his disposition. This place will be lit by the smouldering remains of a fire so that a dusk or twilight may seem to be prevailing there. It will be a place far removed from all haunts of human joy and no sounds

will break the calm of the night except, perhaps, the tiny noise of cricket near the fireplace, or the sleepy cries of the watchman who recites various charms to keep the nocturnal (of the night) evils away from the door.

Lines 85—96 : Gist : Here the poet expresses his desire to keep awake the whole night like a great astronomer and to attain the spiritual heights of Plato and his knowledge. He would also try to know all about the spirits that control the elements.

Be seen in some high lovely Tower—it is a poetic way of saying "Let me study at midnight by a lamp in a lofty tower". Hence a picture is created which strike the imagination. *Outwatch the Bear*—watch beyond the disappearance of the Bear; keep awake even after the Bear has disappeared; keep awake till late in the night. *The Bear*—is a name given to certain group of stars. *Thrice-great*—an expression which emphasises the greatness of *Hermes*—a mythical Egyptian astronomer and philosopher to whom, in the Middle Ages, books on alchemy were attributed. *Unsphere*—move: disturb. *The spirit of Plato*—this shows what sort of contemplation Milton was most fond of. His imagination made him as much a mystic as his good sense would permit. *Unfold*—discover, bring to light. *Vast regions*—extensive regions. *Hold*—contain: surround. *The immortal mind*—the imperishable soul of intellect of Plato. *Hath forsook*—hath forsaken: has farsaken: has left. *Her*—this is used for the *soul*. *Mansion*—abode; palace: home. *Fleshly nook*—earthly corner: earthly body. *Or let my lamp . . . . Her mansion in this fleshly nook*: **Expl.** These lines are an expression of the poet's intellectual curiosity and his longing for extensive knowledge. He wishes to carry on his research into the realm of knowledge till late at night while the stars shine and fade and a silence prevails over a reposing world. He seeks a high and lovely tower in which his lamp will keep burning even after the disappearance of the Bear and he will pursue his studies like the great astronomer Hermes. He will even venture to fly on wings of contemplation into those extensive regions of ideas which lay around the mind

of Plato. He will, thus, know the depths of Plato's immortal mind which, long ago, left its earthly home for heaven.

Demons—spirits. **Note.** He wishes to gain knowledge, also about all the spirits which, according to some belief of the past, have a direct contact with and control over the elements of fire, water, air and earth. The doctrine of these spirits has been thus derived—"There are six kinds of spirits between heaven and hell. The first are those who remained in the highest region of the *ayre* : the second kind is from the middle region of the *ayre*, downward towards the earth. The third is on the earth itself. The fourth in the waters. The fifth in the caves of the earth and so on". It is one of the visions of Thomas Aquinas, that God permitted some of the fallen Angels, less guilty than the rest, in their descent or precipitation from heaven, to remain in the air, fire, water, and earth, till the day of judgment. Milton follows this theory and talks of the earth, water, air and fire. *Whose power hath . . . . or with element*—whose power has a harmony with the earth or with the elements that make up this earth and its life.

Lines 97—102. Gist : Sometimes, let sublime Tragedy come and present the stories of Thebes and Troy and show a few glimpses of Shakespeare.

Gorgeous—splendid ; magnificent. *Sceptre*—the staff or baton borne by kings as an emblem (sign) of authority : royal power. *Pall*—a cloak or mantle, an outer garment. *In scepter'd pall*—wearing royal robes and signs of majesty. *Sometimes let gorgeous Tragedy . . . . come sweeping by.* **Expl.** Milton personifies tragedy and dresses her in royal robes giving her a sceptre and a pall which are the symbols of the majesty, authority and grandeur. By clothing her in her *scepter'd pall*, he intends specifically to point out *regal stories* (royal stories) as the proper subjects of higher drama. It should be borne in mind that classical tragedy always chose lofty themes and stories of kings as its province. Milton also believed in "Attick Tragedies of stateliest and most *regal argument*". *Presenting*—offering to our view : showing. *Thebes, or Pelop's line*—the legend or story of Thebes—the ruined ancient capital of Egypt.

Tale—story. *Of Troy divine*—of holy Troy—ancient city of the Troad, Asia Minor, famous in classic Grecian legends as the capital of Priam. *Though rare*—just glancing at Shakespeare. *Of late age*—in a later period. *Ennobled*—raised to nobility : elevated ; raised. *The buskin'd stage*—Tragedy. The 'buskin' was a high-heeled shoe worn in classical tragedy. *Presenting Thebes .... the buskin'd stage*—presenting the legend of Thebes or the story of Troy or presenting what, in a later period, has elevated the Tragedy. The last two lines refer to Shakespeare who, in a later period, has added greater dignity to Tragedy. *What* stands for the Tragedies or Shakespeare.

Lines 103—108. Gist : The poet wishes that the power of Melancholy would raise the souls of Musaeus (a Greek poet) and Orpheus (musician) to sing their sweet songs.

O sad Virgin—the poet addresses Melancholy as sad Virgin. *Raise*—arouse : awaken. *Musaeus*—a mythical Greek poet. *Bower*—place of rest : his eternal abode. *Orpheus*—a mythical Greek poet and musician. **Note.** Musician and Orpheus are mentioned together in Plato's *Republick*, as two of the genuine Greek poets. To Orpheus or his harp, Milton makes frequent allusions. See the note on Orpheus in *L'Allegro*. *Such notes*—such sweet songs or tunes. *As*—which. *Warbled to the string*—sung in accompaniment with the music of the lyre or harp. *Drew iron tears*—drew or elicited tears from the eyes of a hard-hearted man. *Pluto*—the master of the underworld or hell. The story tells us that Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus, died and went to the underworld and Orpheus wanted her to return to him. Therefore, he charmed the ears of Pluto by means of his sweet music so that Pluto allowed Eurydice to go back with Orpheus. We remember what the effect of Orpheus' music was on men, beasts and trees. Even the hard-hearted Pluto was inclined to grant the wishes of Orpheus, under the effect of music. But Pluto had warned Orpheus not to look back while leading his wife to the world. Orpheus, however, could not resist the temptation and looked back at his wife, with the result that she was snatched from him for ever. *Make Hell grant what love did*

seek—made Pluto grant the wishes of love or the wishes of Orpheus who loved his wife Eurydice and requested for her return to life. *But, O sad Virgin . . . . made Hell grant what love did seek.* **Expl.** Addressing Melancholy as a gloomy Virgin, the poet says, "I wish that your power may arouse the spirit of the Greek poet Musæus from the place of his eternal rest so that I might enjoy the sweet effect of his divine poetry. Or I wish you could move the soul of the great musician Orpheus to sing such sweet songs in accompaniment with his lyre or harp which affected even the hard-hearted Pluto—the master of hell, who was moved to tears and so granted the wishes of Orpheus. The poet yearns for pathetic and touching music the effect of which even the master of Hell could not resist.

Lines 108—120. Gist : The poet wishes Melancholy to call up the soul of Chaucer who left unfinished the *Squire's Tale*. He longs for all those romantic, beautiful, allegorical poems the meaning of which is much deeper than the obvious sense that meets the ear.

Call up him—call up Chaucer. *That left half-told*—who left unfinished. *The story of Cambuscan bold*—the Squire's Tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. *Note*—from these lines it appears that Milton, among Chaucer's pieces, was most struck with his *Squire's Tale*. It is the story of Combuscan, king of Tartary, to whom, on his birthday, an envoy (messenger) from the king of Arabia, brings magic gifts, including a ring for the king's daughter, Canace, which enables her to understand the language of birds. A female falcon tells Canace the story of her own desertion by a tercelet (a male hawk). The poet promises the continuation of the tale but it is incomplete. It best suited his predilection (special liking) for romantic poetry. Chaucer who is called the father of English poetry, is here ranked with the sublime poets and his comic vein is forgotten and overlooked. *Camball and Algarsife*—these are two sons of Cambuscan.

Canace—the daughter of Cambuscan. *That owned the virtuous ring and glass*—who possessed the ring and glass of virtue. These are the magic gifts sent by the king of

Arabia, for the king's daughter Canace. *Wondrous*—wonderful. *Horse of brass*—horse made of metal—one of the magic gifts sent by the king of Arabia to Cambuscan. *Tartar king*—king of Tartary in Asia. *Aught else*—anything else. *Bards*—poets. *Note*: "From Chaucer, the father of English Poetry, and who is here distinguished by a story remarkable for the wildness of its invention, Milton seems to make a very pertinent and natural transition of Spenser, whose "Faerie Queene", although it externally professes to treat of tournaments and the trophies of knightly valour, of fictitious forests, and terrific enchantments, is yet allegorical, and contains a remote meaning concealed under the veil of a fabulous action, and of a typical narrative, which is not immediately perceived. Spenser sings in *sage and solemn tunes*, with respect to his morality, and the dignity of his stanza. In the meantime it is to be remembered that there were other great bards, and of the romantic class, who sang in such times, and who mean more than meets the ear. One is surprised, however, that Milton should have delighted in romances. *Sage and solemn*—well-balanced and dignified. *Turneys*—tournaments in which bravery and strength and skill were displayed. *Trophies*—memorials of victory. *Enchantment drear*—drear enchantments: terrific or gloomy magic arts. *Where more is meant than meets the ear*—in which the real meaning is much deeper than the obvious sense that meets the ear. *And if aught else great bards beside . . . . where more is meant than the ear.* **Expl.** It is the poet's longing to take all the pleasure which great poems like the *Faerie Queene* by Spenser can afford. He believes in the dignity and beauty of these songs and is ready to give himself up to the influence of the stories embodied in these poems. The tournaments and the trophies of knightly valour, the fictitious forests and the terrific magic arts, make these poems romantic and Milton delights in the whole romantic imagery and allegorical pictures which have, in reality, a deeper meaning than their obvious sense that strikes the ears of the reader.

Lines 121—130. Gist: The night spent in a world of ideas and romance should be followed by a morning, gloomy with wind, cloud and gentle rain, of course, without

its usual freshness and gaiety.

Thus—in this condition ; that is, lost in a world of ideas and romance. *In thy pale career*—while you are passing with your darkness and gloom. **Note.** Up to this point, we have seen the night of the melancholy man. Here his day commences (begins). Accordingly, the second part of the poem is ushered in with a long verse, *Civil-suited*—gravely or solemnly dressed. *Morn*—Aurora, the goddess of dawn. *Appear*—appears. *Not trick'd and frounced*—not dressed out and excessively decorated or ornamented. *As she was wont*—as she (Aurora) was accustomed. *With the Attick boy to hunt*—to hunt with the Attick boy. The Attick boy, named Cephalus, was a mythical youth loved by Aurora, the dawn-goddess. *Kercheft in a comely cloud*—wrapped in a graceful cloud. *Rocking winds*—swaying breezes. *Piping loud*—moaning aloud or producing loud sounds. *Or usher'd with a shower still*—or the morning should be preceded or introduced with a still or gentle shower of rain. *Gust*—wind : blast of wind. *When the gust hath blown his fill*—when the wind has blown to its heart's content ; when the wind has blown hard and subsided. *Rustling leaves*—leaves that produce a slight hissing noise as they are moved or shaken by the breeze. *With minute drops*—This is a natural little circumstance calculated to impress a pleasing melancholy. The poet means, by *minute drops from off the eaves*, not small drops, but minute drops—drops which fall at intervals, by minutes, because the shower now is over : as we say *minute-guns*, and minute-bells. **Note.** Remember that in *L'Allegro*, the lark bade good-morrow at the poet's window, through sweet-briers, honeysuckles, and vines, spreading as we have seen, over the walls of the house. Now, the leaves of these plants are dropping-wet with a morning-shower. *Eaves*—the projecting edges of the roof on the outside of a house. *Thus, O Night, oft see me in thy pale career . . . . with minute drops from off the eaves* : **Expl.** The night of the melancholy man is a gloomy night during which, in his remote solitude, he soars into the regions of thought, romance and music. And when the night passes away in contemplation, he yearns for the dawn. But what a different dawn! It

should not be accompanied by its usual freshness and gaiety, colour and light, but instead of being excessively decked and beautifully ornamented it should be cloudy, windy and dreary. The poet speaks of the dawngoddess Aurora and says that she should not come in her usual gay clothes which she is accustomed to wear during her hunt in the company of her beloved youth Cephalus but she should be wrapped only in a graceful cloud while the winds are moaning aloud. And when the wind has blown with all its fierceness and subsided, a gentle shower of rain may accompany the morning. The leaves will restle and then lie still and when even the shower of rain has finished, drops of water will fall occasionally, after short intervals, from the projecting edges of the roof, thus deepening the stillness and cheerlessness of the morning.

Lines 131—138. Gist : When the sun appears, again, the melancholy man betakes himself to thick forests where the woodman has never gone to frighten the fairies of the woods with the strokes of his axe.

Fling—throw : dart. *Flaring beams*—flashing or bright rays. *Me, goddess, bring*—goddess, bring me : O goddess, take me. *Arched walks of twilight groves*—*Arched walks* means avenues or passages in the forest over which the trees are shooting their branches, thus making a sort of arched (curved) roof above them. *Twilight groves*—dark forests : clusters of trees which, on account of their thick foliage, produce a sort of twilight, dusk or darkness among them. *Shadows brown*—brown shadows : this also means the dim, shadowy light in the midst of the trees. *Sylvan*—Sylvanus —the god of woods. *Pine*—a northern cone-bearing, ever-green, resinous tree, furnishing valuable timber. *Monumental oak*—huge oak of an impressive size. Oak is a tree of about 300 species, the most famous being the British oak, valued for its timber in shipbuilding. *Rude axe*—cruel axe—an instrument or tool for cutting wood. *Heaved stroke*—stroke or blow which is given by lifting the axe and then bringing it down with full force. *Nymphs*—the beautiful goddesses or fairies who inhabited the mountains, rivers, trees etc. *Daunt*—frighten : scare. *Was never .... to*

daunt—was never heard to daunt the Nymphs : was never heard to frighten the fairies of the forest. *Fright*—frighten : scare : drive out in fear. *Hallow'd haunt*—sacred habitation or abode : the groves which are sacred to the Nymphs. *And, when the sun begins . . . . from their hallowed haunt*—when the dreary morning passes away with its wind, cloud and gentle rain, and the sun begin to throw its piercing light over the world, the melancholy man requests the goddess Melancholy to take him into the shadows and glooms of thick forests. He loves to move through the arched avenues of pines and stately oaks which produce a soothing twilight that is loved by Sylvanus, the god of woods. He chooses those remote parts of the forest where the footsteps of the woodman have never been heard, where no heavy strokes of his axe have ever frightened the fairies, who live happily in thick groves, to leave their favourite nooks.

Lines 139—150. The melancholy man seeks a remote thicket beside some stream, where, in the gloom of the trees, sheltered from the piercing light of the sun, he may be lulled to sleep by the humming bees and murmuring waters.

Close covert—secret shelter : a hidden place that provides or affords protection. *By some brook*—beside some stream. *Profaner*—impious ; unholy ; impure. *Where no profaner eye may look*—where no impious men can see me. *Hide me*—conceal me : protect me. *Day's garish eye*—the garish eye of the day : the dazzling or bright eye of the day —the sun. Shakespeare calls it *the searching eye of heaven. Bee*—a four-winged insect that makes honey. *With honied thigh*—laden to the thigh with honey. *That at her flowery work doth sing*—which doth sing at her flowery work : which sings while doing her flowery work. The work of the bee is called flowery because the bee has to deal with flowers from which it gathers honey. *And the waters murmuring*—and the murmuring waters of the stream. *Murmur* means a low indistinct noise or sound ; produced by the running water. The song of the bee is its humming ; that of the stream is its murmur. *Consort*—the meaning of this word

is *a partner or companion* : but here the word is used in its obsolete sense : here it means music or tunes. *With such consort as they keep*—with such music as they (the waters) produce. *Entice*—induce : bring. *Demy feathered Sleep*—Sleep which has cool feathers : cool and refreshing or soothing Sleep. *There in close convert . . . . dewy feathered Sleep.* **Expl.** The melancholy man wishes not to be seen by any one and seeks some hidden, shady nook by the side of a stream. There, in the gloom of the cool thicket, with no impious man to disturb him, secure from the dazzling sun of the noon, he wants to lie and listen to the soft music of the humming bee and murmuring waters till sleep overcomes him. He selects two types of music here, to induce sleep. One is that of the busy bee which sings while gathering honey from flowers and the other is that of the running water. Both these sounds and mellow and slumbrous, especially at the time of noon and the gloomy man is lulled to sleep by these soothing sounds.

Mysterious—obscure : incomprehensible : ununderstandable. *Lively portraiture*—vivid pictures or life like visions. *And let some strange mysterious Dream . . . . Softly on my eyelids laid*—we cannot find out any precise meaning of the parts in these lines but the general idea resulting from the whole may be accepted as the meaning of all the four lines : "Let some fantastic Dream put the wings of *Sleep* in motion, which shall be displayed, or expanded, in an airy or soft stream of visionary imagery, gently falling or settling on eye-lids.

Lines 151—154. Gist : He wants to wake under the effect of sweet music coming from everywhere.

Sweet music breathe—let sweet music be heard. **Note.** This wonderful music, particularly the one coming from the earth, proceeding from an invisible cause, and whispered to the pious ear alone, by some guardian spirit, or the genious of the wood, was probably suggested to Milton's imagination by some of the devices of masks in which secret or mysterious music was produced. This music became more enchanting because it seemed to come secretly and strangely out of the earth. *To mortals good*—to good or

pious mortals : to virtuous human beings. *Genious of the wood*—the presiding spirit of forests.

Lines 155—166. Gist: These lines show his love for religious meditation in the church. In the twilight of the church he wishes to pass into spiritual bliss under the effect of holy music.

Due feet—dutiful feet : feet that go regularly to church. *To walk the studious . . . . cloister pale*—to walk with religious zeal of pious fervour in the dim enclosures of a monastery or church. *Cloister*—a place of religious retirement like a monastery : an enclosed place. *Pale*—dimly lit : gloomy. The word *studious* denotes religious ardour or enthusiasm. *High embowed* — highly-valued or arched. *Antick*—old-fashioned. *Pillars*—columns supporting the roof. *Massy proof*—huge and strong. **Note.** Old Saint Paul's Cathedral, from Hollar's valuable plates in Dugdale, appears to have been a most stately and venerable pattern of the Gothic style. Milton was educated at Sainst Paul's school, contiguous to the church ; and thus became impressed with an early reference for the solemnities of the ancient ecclesiastical architecture, its vaults, shrines, aisles, pillars and painted glass, rendered yet more awful by the accompaniment of the choral service. *Storied windows*—windows painted with stories of histories. **Note.** Milton here perhaps remembered also the stories of windows of King's College Chapel ; with the beauty richness, and sacred subjects of which he must have been struck, while a student at Cambridge. *Richly dight*—richly or gorgeously adorned (decorated). *Casting*—throwing ; producing. *Dim religious light*—solemn twilight. *But let my due feet . . . . casting a dim religious light.* **Expl.** The poet now yearns for the pleasures of religious contemplation and wishes to remain faithful to the church. He says, "Let me never be negligent in my duty to the church. Let me never forget to walk about in the gloomy cloisters, lost in pious meditation, with an untiring zeal. I shall always love the high-vaulted roofs and the Gothic pillars which support them with their great strength and the beautifully adorned windows which, with their painted stories, produce a strange and solemn light inside the church.

There—in the church. *Pealing organ*—loud organ. Organ is a musical wind instrument consisting of a collection of pipes made to sound by means of compressed air from the bellows, and played upon by means of keys. *Blow*—sound : produce its sounds. *To the*—in accompaniment with. *Quire*—choir : a chorus or band of singers, especially those belonging to a church. *In service high, and anthems clear*—in high service and clear anthems. *High service*—devotional music : a musical composition for devotional or religious purposes. *Anthems*—sacred songs. *As may*—which may. *Through mine ear*—affecting my soul through my ears. *Dissolve*—melt. *Ecstasies*—spiritual raptures : deep delights of the soul. *All heaven*—all the beautiful nights of heaven. *Mine*—my. *There let the pleasing organ blow . . . . all heavens before mine eyes.* **Expl.** Another pensive pleasure of a solemn nature, the poet longs to have through the sacred music which, at the time of prayer, fills the vaulted chambers of the church. The loud organ sends forth its long and solemn notes while the band of singers with their full voices sing devotional songs in praise of God. Consequently, the sweet, holy music which fills the hallowed atmosphere, enters the soul of the melancholy man through his ears and melts it in a whirl of spiritual pleasures. He loses himself in an ecstasy and perceived the beauty of heaven all around him.

Lines 167—176. Gist: He wishes, now, for a quiet old age and a remote place where he may live like a hermit gaining experience and knowledge and in the end, becoming almost prophetic in his utterances.

Weary age—old age, when a man feels tired and seeks rest. *Peaceful hermitage*—a peaceful, retired place : a quiet secluded corner. *The hairy gown*—hairy gowns were worn by hermits in old days and so a hairy gown is required by the melancholy man. *Mossy cell*—mossy cave : cave, the walls of which are covered with moss. *Moss*—a family of flowerless plants with branching stems and narrow, simple leaves. *Rightly spell of*—make a correct study of. *Doth show*—does show : shows. *Herb*—plant. *Sips*—drinks : sucks. *Do attain to*—attains : achieves. *Prophetick strain*

—prophetic strain : prophetic quality : the ability to foretell or predict about things. *These pleasures . . . . choose to live* —Melancholy, give these pleasures (to me) and I will choose to live with thee. *And may at last my weary age . . . . to something like prophetick strain.* **Expl.** These lines show that Milton wishes to die in the character of the *melancholy* man. In old age he wants the secluded life of a hermit. A quiet remote, mossy cell will suit his purpose. He will put on the hairy gown of a hermit and, sitting in peace, will brood over this universe and study the stars at night. He will imbibe knowledge from the silent citizens of the sky and will study the various kinds of herbs and their properties. Thus will be spent the old age of the melancholy man till his vast experience and extensive knowledge make him almost prophetic in his utterances. He will have studied the world and life so thoroughly that he will be able to forecast or predict about the future events.

III

COMUS

Introduction

1. The Masque in England: The masque, the prototype of the opera, was a very popular form of entertainment during the first half of the seventeenth century. It was a very costly entertainment, mostly meant for a select audience, consisting of lords and ladies, and it was very often written in honour of some distinguished man or woman. The masque attained its greatest glory in the reigns of James I and Charles I. Being a pastime of the aristocracy, it differed from the regular drama in certain important respects. Firstly, it was much more spectacular, as money could easily be spent on gorgeous costumes and elaborate scenery; thus a great architect, like Inigo Jones, spent many of his days in inventing new devices to perfect the scenery in masques. Secondly, music and dancing, which could not find full expression in the drama proper, became the main attraction of the masque: the association of the famous musician, Henry Lawes, with *Comus* illustrates the importance of music for masque-goers. Thirdly, as lords and ladies themselves would often act in masques, they came to be acted by amateurs of either sex; it was quite natural, therefore, that the mere beauty and splendour of the masque should attract the audience more than any subtle or expressive acting.

One of the best authorities on the English Masque defines it as "a combination in variable proportions of speech, dance, and song, but its essential and invariable feature is the presence of a group of dancers, varying in number, but commonly eight, twelve or sixteen called 'masquers'. These masquers never take any part in the speaking or in the

singing : all they have to do is to make an imposing show and to dance." The serious part in a masque was acted by amateurs. Lords and ladies, and sometimes the Queen herself, took part as she did in Samuel Daniel's *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604), and *Masque of Tethys* (1611), and Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*. But the masque soon came to include a less serious element, known as the Anti-masque. Jonson describes the Anti-masque as 'a foil or false masque' and the word 'foil' is enough to indicate its nature. It was meant to be a contrast to the serious poetry and acting in the masque, and thus would include humorous poetry and low comedy, such as we associate with Bully Bottom and his comrades. But Jonson, the greatest writer of Masques, kept the anti-masque within bounds. Its nature is best explained by the following lines written by Jonson in the prefatory note to his "*Masque of Queens*" (1609) :

"I chose the argument to be *A Celebration of Honourable and True Fame, bred out of Vitrue* :—and because Her Majesty had commanded me to think on some dance or shew, that might precede hers, and have the place of a foil or a false masque ; I was careful to decline, not only from others but mine own steps in that kind, since the last year I had an anti-masque of boys ; and therefore, now devised that twelve women, in the habit of hags or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, etc. the opposites to Good Fame, should fill that part, not as a masque but a spectacle of strangeness producing multiplicity of gesture and not unaptly sorting with the current and whole fall of the device." The anti-masque soon gained in popularity, as it provided opportunities for the professional actors, to show their comic talents. It is usually agreed that the anti-masque proper began with Jonson—with his *Masque of Lord Haddington's Marriage* 1608—though it must have been anticipated in the dances and the comic scenes of earlier masques. Many masques contained two anti-masques as in *Comus*. The anti-masque included Witches, Satyrs, Nymphs, Hyades etc. Beaumont once preferred an anti-masque "of a confusion or commixture of all such persons as are natural and proper for

Country sports." But Jonson usually leaned to a more careful choice of characters even for the anti-masque.

The masque could flourish very well in the first half of the seventeenth century, because the greatest artists co-operated in perfecting a form that demanded such co-operation. Ben Jonson was the poet for writing masques, with his perfect lyrics, and his invaluable sense of the comic. The music for his masques was often supplied by the well-known composer, Alfonso Ferrabosco, the son of an Italian musician. Jonson's masques owed a great deal to Ferrabosco's unerring ear for music, and he mentions him with gratitude in *The Masque at Lord Haddington's Marriage* and in *The Masque of Queens*. The help which Milton received from Lawes is another illustration of this co-operation. The elaborate scenery of the masques was devised under the supervision of the famous architect, Inigo Jones, already mentioned, who had a sound knowledge of the Italian Pageants. He who knew both classical and Renaissance art, helped Ben Jonson by introducing ingenious architectural devices to represent the minutely described scenes, and by managing stage-craft in general. The masque, thus, was a very costly entertainment. The average cast of the production of a masque was £1400, *i.e.*, about £8400 of our present money. Some masques undoubtedly cost much more, like Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*, which cost £21000. The connection of the nobility and royalty with the masque is enough to account for the lavishness.

Masques were usually written in honour of some distinguished personage or for some festive occasion. Many of Jonson's masques were written for the *Twelfth Night* Celebrations at the Court, like *The Masque of Blackness*, *The Masque of Queens*, and some were 'commanded' by the King and Queen. Several masques were written for marriage festivals, like *The Masque at Lord Haddington's Marriage*, Compion's *Lord's Masque* in honour of the marriage of Count Palatine, the anonymous *Masque of Flowers* in honour of the marriage of the Earl of Somerset, etc. ; while the King and the great nobles were often welcomed with masques. In fact, as Mr. Verity remarks, "in the reigns

of James and his successor, every noteworthy occasion was signalised in the same way, and the Earl of Bridgewater only complied with the demands of fashion when, in 1634, he laid upon Henry Lawes the commission which resulted in the performance of Milton's *Comus*."

The masque was meant primarily for amusement : and though it is true that 'classical' writers like Ben Jonson tried to combine 'instruction' with amusement, the masque always remained a much lighter and a much daintier thing than the usual drama. Jonson's subjects (e.g. *Pan's Anniversary*, *The Masque of Augurs*) are often drawn from classical mythology or history, and most masques preserve the Renaissanee atmosphere along with their classical allusions, graceful lyrics, and occasional choruses. The anti-masques break the illusion with their rustic dances, and rough humour : but even these anti-masques are in a sense 'classical', since they include Satyrs, Nymphs, Cupids, Hyades and Statues. Another noteworthy feature of the masque is that it often abounds in Abstractions. Several abstractions are personified, till at last, we have in Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*—"Enter Opinion ; Confidence meets him ; they salute." Others who join these two are Novelty, Admiration, Fancy, Jollity and Laughter. The story is usually an excuse for gorgeous scenes, spectacular dances, and music. A poet like Jonson or Milton would occasionally preach the greatness of Virtue and represent the downfall of Vice : but it is quite probable that many of the dilettanti present at a masque listened with greater attention to the beautiful songs, or the compliments to Royalty, and to gay lords and ladies, than to the moral. Some poets *did* try, however, to develop a theme in Milton's manner, and indicated the moral. Thus Jonson closes the *Masque of Queens* with a song that reminds us of the closing lines of *Comus* :

> 'Who, virtue, can thy power forget,
> That sees these live, and triumph yet ?'

Masques were private performances, given at the court or at the palaces of great nobles. The Inns of Court were also great patrons of the masque : on the costliest masque

on record, Shirley's *Triumph of Peace* (1634), produced after Prynne's *Histriomastix*, the four Inns combined to spend more than £21000; and if the music cost £1,000, the dresses cost about £10,000.

The masque grew out of courtly revelry. It is not known when exactly the masque began its career in England, though it is quite plain that the masque, as usually understood, flourished only under the first two Stuarts. From very early times, a dance in masquerade, as Mr. Evans points out, was a favourite diversion at the English Court. Even Edward III was entertained at Guildford with a masked dance. Sometimes the dancers rode on horseback to the court to entertain the king and his household and these visitations, known as "mummings", or "disguisings", were very frequent. The 'disguisers' comprised both men and women, and, their chief duty was to dance. Soon these dances were associated with dialogue, and the scenery was provided by 'Pageants'. Thus in these native disguisings we see the origin of the masque; but the 'home' performances were influenced a good deal by continental practice, and, according to Professor Allardyce Nicoll, the influence from Italy came *via* France. Italian influence is most noticeable in the gorgeous dresses and elaborately contrived scenes. The best known reference to the 'mask' in early sixteenth century literature is in Hall's *Chronicle* :

"On the date of the Epiphanie (1513) at night the king with XI others were disguised after the manner of Italic, called a maske, a thing not sene afore in England : thei were appareled in garments long and brode, wrought all with golde with visers and cappes of gold ; and after the banket doen these Maskers came in with the sixe gentlemen disguised in silke, beryng staffe-torches, and desired the ladies to dance : some were content, and some that knew the fashion of it refused, because it was a thing not commonly seen. And after thei daunced and communed together, as the fashion of the maskes is, thei toke their leave and departed ; and so did the Queene and all the ladies." Hall's reference to the maskers dancing with ladies from the audience shows the intimate contact of actors with the

audience,—a contact which continued to be a characteristic of the masque even to later times. The masque was popular under the Tudors, and Elizabeth was often welcomed with pageants as she was at Kenilworth. In 1594 she attended the *Gesta Grayorum* given by the members of Gray's Inn. The masque gained in popularity under the first two Stuarts. James I encouraged masques more than any other patron, as he had genuine interest in these performances and luckily did not possess Elizabeth's instinct for economy.

The greatest writer of masque was Ben Jonson. Both in quantity and quality, he excels every other writer. Between 1604 and 1640 about 50 masques were performed and printed, out of which Jonson wrote twenty-two. Jonson remains supreme in his skilful handling of situation, in classical flavour, and above all, in the grace of his songs. Other notable writers of the masque were Samuel Daniel, Thomas Campion, Frances Beaumont, George Chapman, Sir William D'Avenant, James Shirley and Thomas Carew. Milton wrote one complete masque, *Comus*, and the short piece, *Arcades*, described as 'part of an entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby' ; *Arcades* is a dramatic pastoral and could have been easily developed into a full masque. With the triumph of Puritanism in the Civil War, the masque, like all drama, suffered a heavy blow, and was never revived again in its original form. Out of the masque developed the later opera. Though Shakespeare never attempted a masque proper, the influence of the masque on his plays is clearly seen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*.

2. The Occasion : *Comus* was presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634, before the Earl of Bridgewater, Lord President of Wales. The Earl was appointed "Lord President of the Council in the Principality of the Wales and the Marches of the same" in June 1631. The office combined civil and military duties and was usually filled by a nobleman of distinction. The official seat was at Ludlow in Shropshire. The Earl did nôt take charge of his office till 1634. He was welcomed at Ludlow with great enthusiasm and *Comus* was the masque that was meant to praise and

congratulate him on his arrival at Ludlow. He was accompanied by Lady Bridgewater and their three children. The parts of the Lady and her two brothers were played by the children. Lady Alice Egerton, a beautiful girl of about fourteen, played the role of the Lady, and her younger brothers, Viscount Brackley and Mr. Thomas Egerton the roles of the Two Brothers.

The 1637 and 1645 editions of *Comus* reveal that it was performed at Ludlow Castle on Michaelmas Night 1634 (September 29). Probably, Milton wrote it at the suggestion of the famous musician, Henry Lawes, who was Milton's friend, and musical tutor to the Egerton family. Lawes played the part of the Attendant Spirit and supplied musical settings to the lyrics, most of which are preserved in the British Museum.

3. The date and the Text of 'Comus': Milton must have been thinking about the masque for a few months at least before it was presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634. Perhaps he was at work on it since the beginning of that year. It is believed that he wrote *Arcades* in 1633 (according to Professor Grierson, between 1630-32). *Arcades* and *Comus*, with their many affinities, were probably written during the years when Milton was interested, at his *L'Allegro* tells us in 'masque and anti-masque pageantry'.

Comus achieved immediate fame. People wanted copies of it, and Lawes obliged Milton by printing *Comus* in 1637 in a small quarto edition. The title-page read :

> "A Maske presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634, on Michaelmass Night, before the Right Honourable John, Earle of Bridgewater, Viscount Brackley, Lord President of Wales, and one of His Majestie's most honourable Privy Counsell.
>
> '*Eheu quid Volui misero mihi ! floribus Austrum Perditus* . . . .' London : Printed for Humphrey Robinson at the sign of the Three Pidgeons in Paul's Churchyard, 1637."

Lawes dedicated the volume to the Elder Brother, Viscount Brackley. The Latin motto from Virgil's second Eclogue

must have been supplied by Milton. The motto, which means :—"Alas! what have I chosen for my wretched self; thus on my flowers, infatuated that I am, letting in the rude wind!"—is believed to refer to the fears entertained by Milton about the success of his masque. It was his first long poem, and he was naturally diffident about its reception. But his fears were ill-founded: *Comus*, in spite of its anonymity, was greeted with applause, as we see from Sir Henry Wotton's letter, written in 1638 and published in the edition of 1645. Wotton, who was then Provost of Eton College, was well known in political as well as literary circles. His letter, therefore, may be regarded as the first memorable compliment to Milton's poetry.

Comus, the first collective Edition of Milton's poems, was brought out in 1645; the second in 1673. In both these, in place of the title, we have the descriptive heading: —"A mask of the same author presented at Ludlow Castle". The edition of 1673 omitted both the Dedication by Lawes and the letter from Sir Henry Wotton.

Thus, in the first three *printed* editions (Lawes's in 1637, and Milton's in 1645, 1673) the mask is without the title, *Comus*, by which we know it now. It is omitted also in the two manuscripts, which are of great importance in a consideration of the text of *Comus*. One of these, the manuscript at Cambridge, known as the *Cambridge MS.*, gives the first draft in Milton's own hand. The second, known as the *Bridgewater MS.*, is usually believed to have been the stage-copy used by Lawes. The *Bridgewater MS.*, was published about fifteen years ago by Lady Alix Egerton. The stage-copy transfers the Attendant Spirit's Epilogue to the beginning, and omits some of the passages that might have sounded indelicate. The five authorities for the text were first collated by Todd: recently, Mr. C. S. Lewis has examined the 'Reading' in *Comus*. Milton himself introduced changes in the text, and hence the last edition published by Milton (1673) is regarded as the most authoritative.

4. 'Comus' as a Masque : *Comus* is one of the latest examples of the masque. It followed closely upon Prynne's famous diatribe against the stage (*Histriomastix*, 1632) and

is, therefore, an indication of Milton's attitude towards the masque in 1634. In *Paradise Lost* Milton speaks with contempt of

> "Mixed dance, or wanton mask, or midnight ball
> Or serenade . . . ."

Thus it is clear that Milton discountenanced masks which were so popular with the cavaliers ; but he was prepared to write one, if it promised in any way to promote his own ideas and ideals. *Comus* is different from other masque in this, that it revolves round its moral. Its didacticism is over-prominent, as its central message was dear to the poet's soul. There is the stamp of Milton's personality even on a semi-literary form, adopted, perhaps, only to oblige Henry Lawes.

Comus differs from other masques in other respects also. The spectacular element is not allowed to assume prominence. It has no real masquers, while dance and music play in it a much less important part than in other masques. Whatever songs it has are noteworthy as much for their meaning as for their music ; while the dances are fewer and less conspicuous. There are more dances in a regular masque, and they are performed by a great variety of masquers; witness, for example *Lord's Masque* by Campion, or *The Masque of Queens* by Jonson. The 'plot' of *Comus* is simple, and its clear outlines are not submerged either by excessive allegory, or by the machinery of gorgeously arrayed gods and goddesses. All this is in refreshing contrast to Jonson's masques.

Further, the anti-mask plays but a minor part. Most masques after 1613 had two anti-masks and included all kinds of dances, and the author would show considerable ingenuity in introducing some original form of the anti-mask. In Jonson's *Masque of Augurs* Vangoose glances at the fantastic character of the 'anti-mask,' when he says that "the more absurb it be, and from the purpose it be even, all the better; if it go from the nature of the thing, it is the more art !" The first anti-mask in *Comus* is the dance of Comus with his rout of monsters : the second is that of

the Country Dancers (l. 958). Doubtless, the first scene must have been very impressive with its 'transformed' crew of Comus: and the second anti-mask must have presented a good contrast to the 'other trippings' of 'lighter toes'. But the anti-mask must supply a good deal of humour. It must come as a relief from the main story, attracting attention either by its absurdity or by sparkling gaiety. Lacking in humour, as Milton was, it was not in him to make the anti-mask humorous. In the monstrous rout on the stage the spectators must have seen—what Milton meant them to see—living examples of the pernicious influence of Comus. There is a far greater seriousness of tone in *Comus* than is usually found in a masque. Though it is not of the regular type, its high moral tone, and matchless poetry accord it a place for above that of other masques.

5. **Dr. Johnson on Comus:** "The greatest of his juvenile performances is the "Mask of Comus"; in which may very plainly be discovered the dawn or twilight of "Paradise Lost". Milton appears to have formed very early that system of diction, and mode of verse, which his maturer judgment approved, and from which he never endeavoured nor desired to deviate.

Nor does "Comus" afford only a specimen of his language; it exhibits likewise his power of description and his vigour of sentiment, employed in the praise and defence of virtue. A work more truly poetical is rarely found; allusions, images, and descriptive epithets, embellish almost every period with lavish decoration. As a series of lines, therefore, it may be considered as worthy of all the admiration with which the votaries have received it.

As a drama it is deficient. The action is not probable. A masque in those parts where supernatural intervention is admitted, must indeed be given up to all the freaks of imagination; but, so far as the action is merely human, it ought to be reasonable, which can hardly be said of the conduct of the two brothers; who, when their sister sinks with fatigue in a pathless wilderness, wander both away together in search of berries too far to find their way back,

and leave a helpless lady to all the sadness and danger of solitude. This however is a defect over-balanced by its convenience.

What deserves more reprehension is that the prologue spoken in the wild wood by the Attendant Spirit is addressed to the audience; a mode of communication so contrary to the nature of dramatic representation, that no precedents can support it.

The discourse of the Spirit is too long; an objection that may be made to almost all the following speeches: they have not the spriteliness of dialogue animated by reciprocal contention, but seem rather declamations deliberately composed, and formally repeated on a moral question. The auditor therefore listens to a lecture, without passion, without anxiety.

The song of *Comus* has airiness and jollity; but what may recommend Milton's morals as well as his poetry, the invitations to pleasure are so general, that they excite no distinct image of corrupt enjoyment, and take no dangerous hold on the fancy.

The following soliloquies of *Comus* and the *Lady* are elegant, but tedious. The song must owe much to the voice, if it ever can delight. At last the Brothers enter, with too much tranquillity; and when they have feared lest their sister should be in danger, and hoped that she is not in danger, the Elder makes a speech in praise of Chastity, and the Younger finds how fine it is to be a philosopher.

Then descends the Spirit in the form of a Shepherd; and the Brother, instead of being in haste to ask his help, praises his singing and enquires his business in that place. It is remarkable that at this interview the Brother is taken with a short fit of ryhming. The Spirit relates that the *Lady* is in the power of *Comus*; the Brother moralises again; and the Spirit makes a long narration, of no use because it is false, and therefore unsuitable to a good Being.

In all these parts the language is poetical and the sentiments are generous; but there is something wanting to allure attention.

The dispute between the *Lady* and *Comus* is the most animated and affecting scene of the drama, and wants nothing but a brisker reciprocation of objections and replies, to invite attention and detain it.

The songs are vigorous, and full of imagery; but they are harsh in their diction, and not very musical in their numbers.

Throughout the whole, the figures are too bold, and the language too luxuriant for dialogue. It is a drama in the epic style, inelegantly splendid, and tediously instructive."

6. 'Comus'—A Critical Review. Dr. Johnson judged *Comus* by the standards proper to drama and found it wanting. But *Comus* is neither good drama nor bad, for the very simple reason that it is not a drama at all. Milton was a great admirer of Shakespeare and knew what good drama was. He had also the dramatic instinct in him, as several passages in *Paradise Lost* show. But here he aimed at adapting the traditional mask to his own purposes. He did need, therefore, an absorbing story, or living characters. He did not even care to name the Lady and the Brothers, who thus, in their generalized vagueness, resemble the 'first gentleman' and 'second gentleman' of Shakespeare's plays. Nor is any development of character expected. Following the tradition of the masque, the Lady and Comus represent Virtue (Chastity) and Vice (Temptation). This sufficed for the conflict—both outer and inner—as Milton envisaged it. It is true that the 'action is not probable', considering that the two brothers waste their time in arguing with each other, instead of going in search of their sister. Justly does Johnson observe that the two brothers "wander both away together in search of berries too far to find their way back; and leave a helpless lady to all the sadness and danger of solitude." But even the argument of the brother, famed to exalt the great power of Virtue, conducted throughout by Milton himself rather than by the characters. These long disquisitions detrtca

greatly from the dramatic qualities of the poem. It has but a single dramatic situation,—the one in which the Lady finds herself unable to move from the magic chair of Comus, and the conflict between Good and Evil reaches its climax.

Milton, as we see from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, could conceive dramatic situations ; but he lacked the objectivity and the art of presenting story and character through dialogue, which are vitally necessary to a dramatist.

7. The Sources of "Comus" : Warton was the first to point out that the story of *Comus* bore considerable resemblance to the plot of George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale* (1595). Milton brobably borrowed from Peele the 'story'—two brothers wandering in search of their sister. In the *Old Wives' Tale*, Calypha and Thelea, wander in search of their lost sister, Delia. Sacrapant, the magician, who, like Comus has learned his art from his mother, has lured away Delia and kept her in imprisonment. The brothers recover their lost sister with the help of the Old Man, who thus resembles the Attendant Spirit. As in Milton's poem, again, the two brothers are answered by Echo three or four times—which may have suggested to Milton the Lady's beautiful invocation of Echo. Peele's drama contains, however, more characters and has a more varied interest than *Comus*. Milton, with his wide knowledge of Elizabethan plays, very probably borrowed the situation from Peele' play.

Comus bears but a distant resemblance to Sacrapant. His picture is drawn by Milton in greater detail and, unlike Sacrapant in *Old Wives' Tale*, is the central character. He is a personification of the Greek *komos*, which meant 'revel' or 'revelling band'. In her Greek mythology Comus was regarded as a winged god of 'festive mirth and joy'. Philostratus (3rd cen. A.D.), perhaps the first writer to mention Comus as a god, represents him as a sort of Bacchus, whose face was ruddy with wine. Probably Milton borrowed his Comus not from classical mythology but from Ben Jonson, who in his Masque of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1619)

calls him 'the founder of tase', and depicts him as a glutton and tippler. Milton's *Comus* is far from being a mere glutton, but the hint for regarding Comus as a great temper may have come from Jonson. There is another possibility also. In a Latin play, called Comus, by a Dutch writer, Erycius Puteanus, first printed in 1608, and reissued at Oxford in 1634, Comus approaches Milton's conception very closely, for in addition to his being a magician, he is also a lover of refined sensuality like Comus. Both may be described as rakes, to whom sensuality is a fine art. Further, there is riotous revelry in the Latin play as in Milton's mask. Milton's originality is seen in the myth he frames for the parcentage of Comus. In Circe, the famous enchantress, he found a fitting mother for Comus, as she could teach him her magic as well as her art of enticing others to her charms. He gives him Bacchus for father, as being the god of revelry. The Bacchae have an obvious resemblance to the monstrous rout of Comus. He thus inherits several traits from his parents. Milton's contribution to the Comus legend is further seen in his making Comus a symbol of all Temptation, endowed with the irresistible charms of Vice. The legend of Circe is told in the *Odyssey*, and also in later poems. Milton was thoroughly familiar with it; and he may also have been guided by the use made of the story of Circe by Spenser and Browne.

The account of the river-goddess, Sabrina, has been traced to the Latin 'History of Britian' by Geoffrey of Monmouth (12th Century). Milton narrates this story in prose in his own 'History of England'. Milton was familiar, too, with the several poets before him, who had narrated the story of Sabrina. Spenser refers to Sabrina in *The Faerie Queene* (II. 10. 14-19). She is mentioned by lesser writers also—by Drayton in *Polyolbion*, by Warner in *Albion's England*, and by the author of the play, *Locrine* Milton is indebted in the handling of the Sabrina story to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*; and toward the close of *Comus*, to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The *Faithful Shepherdess* is a pastoral drama, and deals, like *Comus*, with the power of Virtue. The general handling of the four-foot couplet is very much like that in *Comus*. The

God of the River, in Fletcher's play, rises with Amoret in his hands. The Spirit lavishing benedictions on the River Goddess in *Comus* reminds us of Amoret blessing the God of the River:

> 'For thy kindness to me shown,
> Never from thy banks be blown
> Any tree with windy force,
> Cross thy streams, to stop my course . . . .'

Perigot declares loudly that 'Death is the best reward that's due to lust'. The indebtedness of Milton to Fletcher is obvious.

The influence of *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is seen towards the close, especially in the Epilogue spoken by the Spirit. Nor can we forget Milton's debt to Spenser. Milton looked upon Spenser as his master in song. The influence of the *The Faerie Queene* and *Shepherd's Calendar* is so subtle that it is difficult to single out the borrowings. So well had he mastered Spenser that often he unconsciously echoes him. Milton's indebtedness to him for the Sabrina story has already been mentioned. The suggestion for *Comus* and his 'crew' could easily have come from Spenser's Bower of Bliss, where the enchantress, Acrasia, is surrounded by her victims, those she had transformed into beasts. Spenser meant Acrasia to be the symbol of intemperance. The central situation in *Comus*—the Lady sitting powerless before the Magician—has also a close parallel in Spenser. Florimel, Spenser's embodiment of *Chastity*, is shown to be completely powerless in the presence of a magician who resembles *Comus*. The Lady is set free by a reversal of 'charms' as in *The Faerie Queene* III. 12. The description of Paradise at the end of *Comus* resembles the description of the 'Garden of Adonis' (*The Faerie Queene* III. 6). The influence of Spenser is best seen in the general tone of *Comus*—in the mellifluous phrase and the sensuous detail.

Enough has been said about the possible sources of *Comus*. It has already been remarked that external resemblance usually mean very little—for it is a common

experience that poems or plays written on the same subject do not necessarily attain the same standard. Milton's creative power is seen in his original interpretation of some of the legends, his general attitude towards his theme, and above all, in the sincerity revealed in every line of the poem. We see Milton evolving a new style, whose striking feature is its intense concentration. Nowhere does he lose sight of this central idea : even the 'snaky-headed Gorgon shield that wise Minerva bore' becomes a symbol of the 'rigid looks of chaste austerity'. What Dryden said of Ben Jonson is true of Milton, as it is of every great poet : "He invades authors like a monarch, and what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him."

In addition to the 'Sources' mentioned above, an account based upon 'tradition' must also be touched upon. There was a current tradition, which critics believed in until recently, that the central incident in *Comus* represented actual happenings in the Bridgewater family—that the Lady Alice Egerton and her brothers once found themselves benighted in a dark forest near Ludlow. Modern criticism is inclined to the view that the tradition is nothing more than a romantic legend inspired by the popularity of the masque.

8. The Poetry of 'Comus' : It has already been pointed out that *Comus* differs from the traditional masque in certain important respects. It enthralls us by its poetry as no other masque does. It has indeed been always praised as a poem rather than as a masque. The first great critic of *Comus*, Sir Henry Wotton, says about this 'dainty piece of entertainment' : "I should much commend the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Doric delicacy in your songs and Odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language : "Ipsa mollities". Later generations have confirmed Wotton's judgment. With the single exception of Johnson who found the songs 'harsh in their diction and not very musical in their numbers', every critic has surrendered to the spell of its poetry.

An artist to his finger-tips, Milton has invested his moral ideals with an imperishable beauty of form. The

most striking quality of his poetry is the avoidance of commonplace thoughts and commonplace language. It has the range, resonance and rhythm of "god-gifted" eloquence. The lofty tone is maintained from the beginning to the end. A novice might think that Milton was, after all, a *conscious* artist; but it must be borne in mind that Milton was too great a scholar and too sincere a moralist to speak with any voice but the one 'whose sound was like the sea'. Even the simplest idea borrows a rich and eloquent phrase from Milton. Thus when the Elder Brother wants to indicate his sad disappointment at the absence of star-light, and desires for a farthing taper, he burgeons into lines of sheer enchantment.

"Or, if your influence be quite dammed up
With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,
Though a rush-candle from the wicker-hole
Of some clay habitation, visit us
With thy long levelled rule of streaming light,
And thou shalt be our Star of Arcady,
Or Tyrian Cynosure."

(ll. 335-342)

The fact, that a draught of Comus's liquor transforms every man into a beast, finds expression in lines of delicate tracery:

"And here to every thirsty wanderer
By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,
With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
And the inglorious likeness of a beast
Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage
Charactered in the face."

(ll. 524-30)

The secret of Milton's style lies in the happy choice of adjectives. Milton, like Sir Thomas Browne and De Quincey, uses sonorous and expressive adjectives frequently. This gives fuller cadence to and helps to maintain, what De Quincey calls, the 'slow planetry wheelings of Milton's Verse.' The frequent Elizabethan cry, 'Some lights, oh!' could have better expressed the anxiety and the helplessness

of the Brother, and the sharp cry would perhaps have been more useful than his solemn lines : but then, we would have lost the beautiful phrases of Milton, and the lofty imagination that sees in a rush-candle the mighty purpose of the star of Arcady, and the Tyrian Cynosure would have rusted unused. There is a great deal of truth in Johnson's remark that his 'language is too luxuriant for dialogue'; though we may not agree with what follows—'It is a drama in the epic style, inelegantly splendid, and tediously instructive.' The epic style is really the greatest glory of Milton's poetry : for here he stands apart ; nor can we find fault with instruction, in a poem that is manifestly allegorical. The wonder is that even moral - and therefore 'tedious'—sentiments come with the seraphic glow of imagination.

Milton's long-sustained flights are usually slow in movement, and he shows greater concentration than Shakespeare. The imagery in *Comus* is far more sensuous and colourful, than the imagery of his later poems. But even here we do not find Shakespeare's quick transition from image to image, which gives us a mosaic of brilliant pieces, thrown with the carelessness of a monarch. Milton, from the very beginning, shows a careful choice of words and expects every word and image to do its duty. But in *Comus*, we see his muse in the wondrous bloom of her youth, clothed with a brilliance and colour, that justify his claim to be considered as 'the last of the Elizabethan' :

"And the gilded car of day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream."

Or

'Braid your locks with rosy twine
Dropping odours, dropping wine'.

It is natural that the stately palace of Comus should be 'set out with all manner of deliciousness'. The lines in which Comus describes the alluring charms of his palace and the description of the 'happy climes' in the epilogue could have been written only by Spenser. No short quotation from these passages will fully reveal their beauty. The

poem is richly inlaid with metaphorical phrases and sentences: 'drowsy-flighted steeds', 'close-curtained sleep' or 'the blabbing eastern scout', 'the Nice Morn peeping from her cabined loop-hole'; or 'the flowery-kirtled Naiades', or 'dark veiled Cotytto'.

There are few similes in *Comus*. But the few that are, are supremely beautiful:

> "They left me when the grey-hooded Even
> Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed
> Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phoebus' Wain."

> "But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree
> Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
> Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye."

Milton's imagery is drawn largely from classical mythology, and seldom from everyday life. He differs in this respect from Shakespeare, who rifles his images from every conceivable art and trade.

9. The Songs in 'Comus': Macaulay's eloquent praise of the songs cannot be bettered.

"The finest passages are those which are lyric in form as well as in spirit.—It is when Milton escapes from the shackles of the dialogue, when he is discharged from the labour of writing two incongruous styles, when he is at liberty to indulge his choral raptures without reserve, that he rises even above himself. Then, like his own good genius bursting from the earthy form and weeds of Thyrsis, he stands forth in celestial freedom and beauty." The Epilogue, with its unconscious echoes of Shakespeare, give us a picture of paradise, beautiful in its simple and expressive epithets, and cunningly devised harmony. It is not detailed description. The epithets suggest the beauty of Paradise—e.g. 'the *rosy-bosomed* Hours', '*crisped* shades and bowers," 'Spruce and jocund Spring'. From the whole passage are born the 'blissful twins—Youth and Joy.' The song '*Sabrina Fair*', picturing the goddess with her loose train of amber-dropping hair, and the beauty and charm of

several water-deities, holds us in its spell by its slow movement. The invocation to echo harmonizes with the character of the Lady and the occasion. Its music depends as much on dexterous modulation of lines as on the very careful handling of the liquids and nasals:

> By slow Meander's margent green
> The violent-embroidered vale
> The love-lorn nightingale.

Milton's songs have the art that conceals art. Inspiration and art combine to give us lyric whose beauty raises them above those of contemporary masque. Mr. Bailey observes that in the Echo-song Milton achieved the perfection of Pindar; but such songs, unfortunately, were not quite in Milton's vein, and their rarity makes them all the more precious.

10. The characters and their allegorical significance: *Comus* is not a drama, and characterisation is not Milton's main object. Nor was Milton fitted by nature for creating living characters. For though he had a good sense of the dramatic, he was too much of an introvert to create convincing characters. A true dramatist forgets himself in his characters. Milton, it must be conceded, is successful in creating at least one character with whom he is not in sympathy—Comus. But the others, who are really mouthpieces of the poet's own views, he has not cared even to name. All the characters, moreover, have an allegorical significance, standing as symbols for different principles. This is another reason why the characters are not as convincing as the characters in a great drama. Comus stands as the symbol of Temptation, and all his thoughts and ideals are in keeping. The defence he gives of his own philosophy and practice (*Lines 706-754*) is, however, so cogent and spirited that for a moment we begin to feel that Milton is making here a somewhat dangerous experiment—an experiment which he was to repeat in the character of Satan, and one that Shakespeare had very successfully made in the character of Falstaff. Comus becomes an insidiously alluring sophist whose glozing tongue can easily tempt the ignorant and the weak. The atmosphere of his palace also

helps us visualise the personality of this magician, who takes such an infernal delight in transforming men into beasts. It was really necessary to show that Temptation was hard to resist: for the triumph of the Lady and of the Spirit is measured by the strength of the magician's spells. Milton endows *Comus* with a love of Nature and of Beauty, that shows him to be a true Epicurean, and voluptuary, to whom the art of life consisted in an endless chase of pleasures. There is something of beauty even in the life of *Comus*. As Sir Walter Raleigh aptly remarks "Milton cannot draw ugliness . . . . *Comus*, we are told, stands for a whole array of ugly vices—riot, intemperance, gluttony and luxury. But what a delicate monster he is and what a ravishing lyric-strain he is master of!"

The *Lady* represents the power of Virtue, in particular, of Purity and Chastity. The Chastity of a true virgin needs no protection from men, for God Himself guards her virtue. The arguments used by the *Lady* are Milton's own. Indeed, it is Milton's doctrines that are voiced by the Elder Brother, the *Lady* and the *Spirit*. The *Lady* makes the most impressive speech against the clever argument of *Comus* in championing the 'sun-clad' power of chastity. Her speech even suggests Milton's republican views, when she asserts that if Nature's blessings were distributed with any justice, none would be made to face poverty and degradation. The true moral of *Comus*, the praise of Temperance, is clearly stated by her :

> "Impostor ! do not charge most innocent Nature
> As if she would her children should be riotous
> With her abundance ; she, good cateress,
> Means her provision only to the good,
> That live according to her sober laws,
> And holy dictate of Spare Temperance . . . "
>
> (ll. 762-767)

From the moment she enters the poem the atmosphere becomes purer and nobler : even *Comus*, busy with his 'measure', feels the different pace of some 'chaste footing'. The lady, however, should not be regarded as a champion of eternal Virginity ; she does not represent the ideal of a

nun, but only the necessity of Temperance in all things. The *Lady* stands as the symbol of a lofty ideal, and hence Milton does not try to endow her with any 'womanly' qualities. Her faith, we imagine, is intuitive, and her spiritual beauty envelops her with a halo. 'Shades of the prison-house' have not yet closed upon her, and it was indeed appropriate that the very young lady Egerton should have been chosen to play her role.

Nor are the two Brothers creatures of flesh and blood. They speak from books rather than from experience, and they are chosen to supplement the views of the *Lady*. The dialogue between the Brothers is intended as an argument about the efficacy of Virtue: and if the Second Brother grows a bit sceptical, he does so only to provide another opportunity for the elder Brother to expatiate on the topic. According to the Elder Brother, the 'hidden strength' in man is the strength of chastity; and Milton makes him 'call antiquity from the old Schools of Greece' in support of his thesis. Both the Brothers appear to be interested more in the divine truth of philosophy than in actual life. Their faith in knowledge is so great that they calmly carry on a discussion as to the strength of Virtue, while their sister is lost in the forest.

The Attendant Spirit is the Prospero of the Masque. He is omniscient, and knows the hearts of the virtuous. He is ready to protect the Pure and Innocent against all the wiles of Temptation. In fact, he represents God Himself—and His intervention in human affairs when necessary. It is somewhat strange, however, that even the Attendant Spirit is for a time disconcerted by *Comus*, and has to seek the aid of a Goddess—Sabrina. It is stranger still that the Spirit learnt of Hæmony from 'a certain shephered lad'. These slightly incongruous elements can be explained, for Hæmony gave Milton an opportunity to describe his friend, Diodati, while the introduction of Sabrina adds materially to the spectacular and musical aspects of *Comus*.

11. The Plot of 'Comus': Two brothers, sons of a noble lord "of mickle trust and power," in company with their sister, a young and virtuous lady, were travelling

through a dreary forest, which was the haunt of a wicked enchanter, named Comus. The lady, weary with her long journey, is left by her brothers, who go to gather "cooling fruit" for her. But evening setting in, they cannot find their way back to their sister who sings to let them know her whereabouts. Her song is heard by Comus who comes up, and discovers the beautiful lady in her forlorn and unprotected state. His wicked mind instantly forms the idea of making her a prize for his unprincipled voluptuousness. Assuming the disguise of a harmless peasant, he shows great concern for the lady, and offers to his own lowly but loyal cottage, until he hears of her stray attendants. The lady, after commending herself to the protection of Providence follows her treacherous guide. But the enchanter soon throws off his mask, imprisons the lady in an enchanted chair, and presents to her his charmed cup, plying her alternately with entreaties and threats. The lady, however, aided by her innate virtue, resists and baffles all his devilish wiles.

Meanwhile, the brothers, unable to find their way back to their sister, become dreadfully uneasy lest some harm should befall her; nevertheless, they comfort themselves with the protection which Heaven affords to innocence. At this time, the good Spirit, with whom the poem opens, makes his appearance in the disguise of Thyrsis, an old shepherd of the family, and informs them of the character of Comus, and his wicked designs upon his sister. Under his guidance they rush in on Comus and his crew, and put them to the rout after a short resistance. But the lady being still imprisoned in the enchanted chair, the attendant Spirit invokes the goddess Sabrina "to undo the charmed band." Sabrina rises, and releases the captive by her counter-spells. The lady and her brothers are then conducted to their father's court, and there received in joy and triumph. At last the attendant Spirit after passing an eulogium upon virtue, returns to heaven, whence he came.

12. The Meaning of 'Comus': It has been made sufficiently clear that the conflict in *Comus* is between

Temptation and Virtue; Virtue wins in the end, and Milton sings the praise of Temperance. "It is a song to Temperance as the ground of freedom, to Temperance as the guard of all the Virtues, to beauty as secured by temperance, and its central point and climax is in the pleading of these motives by the Lady against their opposites in the mouth of the Lord of Sensual Revel". Milton was very fond of representing such a conflict between Good and Evil, and it forms the substance of his epics, and *Samson Agonistes*. *Comus* shows that it engaged Milton's thoughts even when he was young, and that he was born to be the champion of Virtue against Vice.

Comus, in addition to this general moralising, has also been made to yield a more 'particular' meaning. It can obviously throw light on the development of Milton's moral ideas—especially, his attitude towards chastity; it may also have some reference to the conflict that was going on in England between the Puritans and the Cavaliers. Through the warp of the moral allegory runs the woof of political and ecclesiastical allegory. For *Comus* represents, too, the clash between Puritans and the Cavaliers, between the austere purity of the former and the gay abandon and wild licence of the latter. Comus stands as the symbol of Cavalier extravagance and licentiousness; and the Lady, her Brothers, Sabrina, and the Spirit speak in the manner of the true Church,—the Church of Christ. For a few years after *Comus*, in *Lycidas*, we see him openly attacking the corrupt clergy. From another point of view, Comus symbolizes the church of Archbishop Laud, who tries to make people drink from his magic cup a potion that is nothing but disguised Roman Catholicism. The Lady, who stands for the true Church, becomes powerless: and it is only after receiving help from God and His angels that she regains her freedom. We should not however unduly emphasize the 'topical' significance. Deeper than all topical bearings *Comus* foreshadows a struggle that is eternal in this world; and its powerful portrayal of this conflict between Good and Evil, and the lofty moral that it preaches, will be remembered when its significance for the England of Milton is forgotten.

13. 'Comus' and Chastity: It is possible to maintain that *Comus* is the expression of a conflict in Milton's mind. Says Professor Saurat:

"Like the great ascetics of primitive magic, Milton was chaste in order to acquire supernatural powers". And "the theme of *Comus* is no artificial choice; it corresponds to one of the deepest needs in the poet: the need to triumph over sensuality, which in itself implies sensuality".

There have been many attempts to establish a close connection between Milton's glorification of chastity, in *Comus*, and his own private experiences. Before any thing definite can be said on this point, it must be remembered that *chastity* was the theme handled by the two great poets who influenced Milton most in the writing of *Comus*—Spenser and Fletcher (*Faithful Shepherdess*). Nor can we forget the influence of Plato, which is most pronounced in the passage that exalts chastity (453-75).

Milton was a Puritan in the best sense of the term, and he could never have tolerated pre-marital sexual experience. The question now is, does he advocate permanent celibacy in *Comus*? Or does he insist only on chastity before marriage? Milton is not explicit in *Comus*. And many critics cite his studious life at Horton, and his early poems and letters in support of their argument that the young poet, fresh from Cambridge, was thinking of leading a life of celibacy. It is pointed out, for example, that in the poem, *At a Solemn Music*, he suggests that the celestial music is heard only by those who have taken the vow of chastity. All later evidence, however, shows that Milton never thought of clinging to an ascetic ideal. His defence of *Divorce* is proof enough. Marriage which was a mere union of bodies, and not of souls, revolted him. To his sensitive nature it was nothing more than wallowing in the "sty of Epicurus". His Italian Sonnets and Latin Elegies, written while he was a student, show him as an admirer of feminine beauty. His later poems also witness his susceptibility to it. It appears, therefore, that the insistence on

'Chastity' is due to the poet's consciousness of the suscepti-bility we have spoken of—it is a warning to his own soul. We can easily imagine the conflict in his mind—the conflict between ideal Puritanism and the natural demands of the body. While at Horton he strove for an all-sided perfec-tion, and the ideal of chastity must have particularly appealed to him as a reaction against thoughts of sex which were haunting him during the period. He represents chastity as having a mystical power :

a hidden strength
Which if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own.
'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity.
She that has it, is clad in complete steel.
. . . .
So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity
That, when a soul is found sincerely so
A thousand liveried angels lackey her.

But chastity could have been only *one* of the several methods of attaining perfection, and even in *Comus* the insistence on *Temperance* has too often been ignored. "In Milton, who believed in, or came later to believe in, the natural goodness of the flesh, the notion was unhealthy", says Mr. Tillyard. "It lasted perhaps in his mind till his journey to Italy—anyhow all traces of it have vanished in *Paradise Lost*, where not merely is human love exalted, but the angels enjoy some higher physical mingling".

Milton's *Pamphlets on Divorce*, and *Apology for Smectymnuus* throw much light on his attitude towards sexual love. The following passage from the *Apology for Smectymnuus* states his views about the year 1642 :—

"Thus, from the laureat fraternity of poets, riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy; but chiefly to the divine volumes of Plato and his equal Xenophon : where if I

should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love, I mean that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only virtue, which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy (the rest are cheated with a thick intoxicating potion, which—a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name, carries about) ; and how the first and chiefest office of love begins and ends in the soul, producing those happy twins of her divine generation, knowledge and virtue."

" But having had the doctrine of holy scripture unfolding those chaste and high mysteries, with timeliest care infused, that "the body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" ; thus also I argued to myself, that if unchastity in a woman, whom St. Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable ; in that he sins both against his own body, which is the perfector sex, and his own glory which is in the woman ; and that which is worst, against the image and glory of God, which is in himself. Nor did I slumber over that place expressing such high rewards of ever accompanying the Lamb with those celestial songs to others inapprehensible, but not to those who were defiled with women, which doubtless means fornication ; *for marriage must not be called a defilement.*"

14. The Personality of Milton and the Miltonic idea : Milton the man nominates his poety. *Comus* shows Milton as he was in 1634 ; and it is important as marking a stage in the development of his personality. Many of the characteristics of the great epic are present in *Comus* also ; but it has others that reveal the spring-time of youth.

Milton combined in himself the best that was to be found in classical and Christian cultures. And what strikes us most in *Comus* is his readiness to assimilate whatever was good and pure. He drew as freely upon the classics as upon Puritanism. As Mr. Bailey puts it, he managed to unite in himself 'the strength of the Reformation with the breadth of the Renaissance". He never suffers from a

narrow vision. He accepts the wisdom of Greek philosophers as calmly as he does the teaching of Christ and his Apostles. The divine praise of chastity and the sensuous charm of the Palace of Comus, the description of Nature's plenty, the holy beauty of the Lady and the magic snares of Circe and her son—illustrate this blend of classical and Puritan cultures in Milton.

His wide and deep scholarship is seen on every page. Not only is he thoroughly acquainted with the writers of Greece and Rome, but he is equally at home with those of his own country—Spenser, Shakespeare, Fletcher and a host of lesser men. One of the most musical of poets, he is no less interested in abstract thoughts, and praises divine Philosophy. His emotion is always held in check by reason, and in the best passages, we listen to logical argument, that reminds us of classical orators.

Milton handles the anti-masques with characteristic lack of humour. This lack of humour results from that 'high seriousness', which Milton always looks for in poetry.

That Milton is a great idealist need not be re-affirmed. In life and in poetry, he champions high ideals, and takes up cudgels on behalf of what he considers to be Truth and Justice. Both *Comus* and *Lycidas* sing of the bliss that Virtue confers, and condemn all corruption of the body and the soul. He is, above all, the enemy of all extravagance, of all extremes. His is the classical ideal—the ideal of restraint. The life of every individual must be disciplined and well-ordered : hence his great paean to Temperance.

15. Milton's Style in "Comus": The Puritan Milton was a dreamer of the beautiful in the world of Nature and Man. Unlike the painter and the sculptor, who need comparatively longer time to realize in canvas and marble the entrancing forms that haunt their imaginations, he could, when he willed, by the melody and magic of words clothe with flesh and blood the visions that projected themselves on the screen of his mind. Milton's was a powerfully evocative imagination. What his inner eyes brooded

upon intensely he could communicate vividly. What he *saw* with them was sometimes aspects of Nature—" bells and flowerets of a thousand hues ', with " their quaint enamelled eyes " ; " the grey-hooded Even like a sad votarist in palmer's weeds " ; " the dragon womb of Stygian darkness " as she " spet her thickest gloom and made one blot of all the air " ; " the vermeil-tinctured lip " of a maiden with " love darting eyes and tresses like the morn ". But more often, Milton conjured up purely imaginary shapes and forms. A thousand fantasies thronged into his memory—

> Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
> And airy tongues that syllable men's names
> On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.

His imagination could translate impressions of one sense into those of another. He could picture ravishing strains " floating upon the wings of silence through the empty-vaulted night and smoothing the raven down of darkness till it smiled ". The favourite realm of his creative art was that of the ideal and the romantic. He was in his element when he contemplated the remote, the strange, the vague, the vast —the lovely beckoning shadows of the mind.

This same romanticism quickened into ecstatic life every god and goddess, every incident and scene in the myths of the antique world. Classical mythology, to Milton, was not so much dead cargo that scholarship must carry willy-nilly : it was the very life-breath of his poetic power. Hippotades and the sleek Panope, the fountain Arethuse and smooth-sliding Mincius, Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet, Leucothea's lovely hands and Ligea's golden comb—the countless associations of Greek mythology were to him a living and a *present* world of *realized* beauty. He lived, moved, and had his being in them, not as scholar, but as poet. When Milton makes heavy inroads into classical mythology, he does so with the confidence of an emperor who knows that he conquers only to civilize and to uplift. Mark the evening clouds, grey and mournfully dead just a while ago, now passionately quivering into a thousand colours born of a

sudden glow! The heavens are transfigured, even as you have been looking on disconsolately. Or, think of the statues of Memnon,—colossal blacknesses—becoming vocal, as it were, with rapturous melodies—so classical writers tell us—as the virgin rays of the rising sun struck music out of the dark effigies. Even so, the entire world of ancient legend glows with a new-born poetic beauty, and breaks into song as the rays of Milton's imagination touch it.

What then is the bearing of all this on Milton's style especially in *Comus*? It brings graphically to our minds three of its prominent elements—its *romanticism*, its *intense evocative power*, and its *opulent allusiveness*. Add to these the wonderful *melody of his verse*, its *cunning artistry*, the *shimmering diction*, now Latinate, now Anglo-Saxon now familiar, now strange, its *classic restraint and economy*, the constant, *ever-renewed surprise of striking imagery*—and you have in view all the instruments of his orchestrated harmony. Each of them contributes to the wizardry of what we call Milton's style. Just for a specimen, analyze the effect in the first sixteen lines of the exordium to *Comus*—one of the grandest in English poetry. It pictures the contrast between "the regions mild of calm and serene air" where "live insphered immortal shapes of bright aerial spirits" and the smoke and stir of this dim spot which men call Earth, where they strive to keep up a frail and feverish being. In four phrases Milton sums up the miserable sordidness of human life:—"low-thoughted care" "Confined and pestered in this pinfold here"; "a frail and feverish being"; "the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould." The alliterations in *pestered* and *pinfold*, the alliteration-cum-consonance in *confined*, *pinfold*, *frail* and *feverish*, help to intensify the impression, until the *r's* in *ambrosial*, *rank* and *sin-worn* come to clinch the impression and drive home the contrast. 'Amb*r*osial' cannot but recall sta*rr*y, 'th*r*eshold,' 'immo*r*tal:—

> Of b*r*ight ae*r*ial spi*r*its live insphe*r*ed
> In *r*egions mild of calm and se*r*ene air,

The *m's* in 'mansion', 'immortal', and 'calm', serve to

complete the picture of the heavenly world—which is bright, serene, mild and immortal. Against this, the intricate sound effects of the next line come in to concentrate the darkness and evil enveloping "the smoke and stir of this dim spot."

Consonance, assonance and alliteration combine with a superb vowel consonantal melody to consummate the final effect. That effect is something beyond the contrast I have spoken of. For, in the overture, the poet seeks to take our minds away from the pinfold of a stage before us, and make them dwell on the unimaginable splendour and inconceivable vastness of that other world from which the Spirit of God descends to this sin-worn mould, on an errand of mercy. The earth is descried from afar as a dim-spot, and presently it grows larger, looking like a pinfold; and anon the rank vapours are seen in more disturbing dimensions. We recall the Spirit of the Years, the Pities and the Ironies in *The Dynasis*, viewing from above the arrogances of crawling creatures on earth.

Once again, mark the artistry in:

We that are of purer fire,
Imitate the starry quire,
Who in nightly watchful spheres,
Lead in swift round the months and years
The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
Now the moon in wavering morrice move;

The swiftness of the fourth line and the undulation of the last are wonderfully adapted to the dance of time—with its swift revolution of months and years—and the wavering morrice of sounds and seas.

For intensity of effect and the avoidance of surplusage, consider:

(i) and makes one blot of all the air,
(ii) and disinherit chaos that reigns here,

(iii) Himself is his own dungeon.

(iv) And strangled with her waste fertility.

Some of the lines run to aphorisms ;

(i) Beauty is Nature's coin.

(ii) Danger will wink on opportunity,

(iii) Virtue could see to do what Virtue would.

For beauty of sustained imagery recall verses 131-41. Sonorous proper names and crowded classical allusions greet the reader in verses 868-880. Of the former we have a striking instance in *Lycidas* :

Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold

The well-known Miltonic devices are here too. We have *inversion* in :

Of night and loneliness it recks me not.

parenthesis in :

(Who knows not Circe . . . . swine ?)

rhetorical question in the same lines ; and a striking descent to simplicity in :

What hath night to do with sleep ?

the compressed Latin construction in :

after the Tuscan mariners transformed
(Latin, *post nautas mutatos*)

the *abstract for the concrete* (*synecdoche*) in ll. 107-110 ; and the symbol for the thing symbolized (*metanymy*) in :

that lend their ears

To those budge doctors of the stoic fur.
And fetch their precepts from the cynic tub,

In *Comus* we notice two different kinds of style—the one informed by a rich sensuousness and imaginative suggestiveness, and the other, close-textured, and less coloured, fitted for argument. Both the styles are literary ; both, ill-adapted for dramatic purposes. The failure of the dramatic style spells the triumph of the lyric. We may describe its general character in a sentence of Professor J. H. Hanford's : "Milton is erudite, but all erudition is not for him of equal value. Winnowed, humanized, and touched with the fire of imagination, his studies have passed into vital experience and afford him as natural a body of poetical data as birds and flowers."

The Diction—Milton is one of the few poets in the language who combine genuine poetic inspiration with the labour and polish of the chisel and file. Fastidious to his finger-tips, he tested every phrase before he finally passed it ; and he was a tireless reviser. His poems at their best are no less "strictly meditated" than spontaneous—spontaneous in the sense that in his noblest passages he is under the mastery of a Creative Power in whose hands he is but the instrument.

(*a*) Archaisms, (*b*) compound words, (*c*) and Latinised diction, witness to his deliberate choice of vocabulary. The following illustrate them serially :

(*a*) *empris ; clouted shoon ; to-ruffled ; mickle ; dew-besprent.*

(*b*) *low-thoughted ; flowery-kirtled ; dragon-watch ; solemn-breathing ; drowsy-flighted.*

(*c*) *meditate : horror ; prevented ; innumerous ; crude ; translated.*

Like the Elizabethans Milton, too, uses verbs and adjectives as nouns, nouns as adjectives, adjectives as adverbs ; and occasionally, verbs as nouns. He shuffles the parts of speech in the ends of poetic speech.

But the most striking effects in diction are achieved by two opposite methods. First, Milton uses the *unexpected word*, which takes our breath away by its absolute rightness :

Blind mouths (*Lycidas*) ; *scrannel* pipes (*Ibid*) ; *imbodies* and *imbrutes* (*Comus*) ; *unthread* thy joints (*Ibid*) ; *arbitrate* the event ; *disinherit* ; chaos ; *over-exquisite* ; *corporeal rind* ; *immanacled* (*Ibid*).

On the other hand, Milton, like Shakespeare, uses the commonest words in striking contexts—often helped on by their Latin meaning :

(i) thank the gods *amiss*.

(ii) these *rough* shades never did breed.

(iii) amongst *rude* burs and thistles.

(iv) your berries *harsh* and *crude*.

(v) But come, let's on

(vi) the wrath of Jove *speaks* thunder.

(vii) like an *ill* borrower.

(viii) *ill* is lost that praise.

16. 'Comus' and the Stage: *Comus* has seldom been popular on the stage. Even in the seventeenth century, there was probably only one performance—the one at Ludlow Castle. It was presented on Michaelmas night, (29th September) 1634. The hall of the Castle, where the performance took place, was a fairly big one, sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, and it must have been specially decorated for the occasion. The audience must have consisted of the distinguished friends of the Bridgewater family, and some citizens of the town.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the court-stage was rapidly changing its appearance ; and the influence of the court-stage was also seen on private and public theatres. Owing to the efforts of Inigo Jones, and the keen interest evinced by James himself, the stage made a very rapid progress. Crude methods of representation gave place to the new and refined stagery of Inigo Jones. The stage gradually lost its Elizabethan baldness, and developed movable scenery, superior mechanical contrivances, and

more gorgeous costumes; a conscious attempt was being made to maintain the dramatic illusion, and the changes in scene were not as crude and childish as they had been on the earlier stage. Though the front curtain was not yet generally used, change of scene was brought about in many ingenious ways. Inigo Jones constructed machines for the descending and ascending of gods and goddesses, and instead of pageants, painted curtains were often used. According to Mr. Thorndyke, "by the thirties the stage had complicated mechanism for moving scenes, a rising curtain, and a proscenium arch, and in these respects approached the picture-frame stage of the 19th century."

That the Hall at Ludlow was transformed into a theatre for the performance, is clear even from the stage-directions. A stage-direction like '*The Spirit descends*' or '*Sabrina rises*,' implies mechanical contrivances. The hall must have been brilliantly lit in the beginning; but before the entry of the Spirit the lights must have been dimmed, so that the 'wild wood' could present a more realistic appearance. The performance began, as the Bridgewater *MS.* indicates, with the song of Lawes—i.e. with the Epilogue in which the necessary changes were introduced.

The spectacular element in *Comus* could have attracted some attention, though it must be granted that Milton's masque cannot compete with other masques in this respect. The appearance of Comus with his monstrous rout—the 'glistering apparil,' and his semi-human beasts—must have created great enthusiasm. The palace of Comus must also have been presented with royal extravagance. The third most spectacular scene is the 'rising of Sabrina' like a goddess—with divine beauty and floral splendour. With the introduction of the country-dancers, the dramatic illusion begins to wane; for, immediately after the country-dance, Lawes advances with Lady and her Brothers, and addresses the Earl and the Countess.

The performance, therefore, depended a good deal on the rich and spectacular scenes, on the captivating

music of Lawes, and on the several dances; Milton's verse could have bewitched only real lovers of poetry. Parts of the music written by Lawes for the Ludlow performance are available. There is also an 18th century adapta bon of the masque made by John Dalton. Dr. Arne, the celelerated composer, wrote music for the new version, which became popular, and was produced frequently at different theatres; it was produced at Drury Lane in 1738. The most noteworthy attempt to revive the masque was made by the famous actor, Macready, who himself played the part of Comus.

DEDICATION OF THE ANONYMOUS EDITION OF 1637

" *To the Right Honourable John, Lord Brackly, son and heir-apparent to the Earl of Bridgewater etc.*"

"MY LORD,

This Poem, which received its first occasion of birth from yourself and others of your noble family, and much honour from your own person in the performance, now returns again to make a final dedication of itself to you. Although not openly acknowledged by the Author, yet it is a legitimate offspring, so lovely and so much desired that the often copying of it hath tired my pen to give my several friends satisfaction, and brought me to a necessity of producing it to the public view, and now to offer it up, in all rightful devotion, to those fair hopes and rare endowments of your much-promising youth, which give a full assurance to all that know you of a future excellence. Live, sweet Lord, to be the honour of your name; and receive this as your own from the hands of him who hath by many favours been long obliged to your most honoured Parents, and, as in this representation your attendant *Thyrsis*, so now in all real expression.

Your most faithful and most humble Servant,

H. LAWES."

"*The Copy of a Letter written by Sir Henry Wotton to the Author upon the following Poem.*"

"From the College, this 13 of April, 1638.

Sir,

It was a special favour when you lately bestowed upon me here the first taste of your acquaintance, though no longer than to make me know that I wanted more time to value it and to enjoy it rightly; and, in truth, if I then could have imagined your farther stay in these parts, which I understood afterwards by Mr. H., I would have been bold, in our vulgar phrase, to mend my draught (for you left me with an extreme thirst), and to have begged your conversation again, jointly with your said learned friend, over a poor meal or two, that we might have banded together some good Authors of the ancient time; among which I observed you to have been familiar.

Since your going, you have charged me with new obligations, both for a very kind letter from you dated the 6th of this month, and for a dainty piece of entertainment which came therewith. Wherein I should much commend the tregical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Doric delicacy in your Songs and Odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language: *Ipsa mollities*. But I must not omit to tell you that I now only owe you thanks for intimating unto me (how modestly soever) the true artificer. For the work itself I have viewed some good while before with singular delight; having received it from our common friend Mr R., in the very close of the late R.'s Poems, printed at Oxford: whereunto it was added (as I now suppose) that the accessory might help out the principal, according to the art of Stationers, and to leave the reader *con la bocca dolce*.

Now, Sir, concerning your travels; wherein I may challenge a little more privilege of discourse with you. I suppose you will not blanch Paris in your way: therefore I have been bold to trouble you with a few lines to Mr M.B,, whom you shall easily find attending the young Lord S. as

his governor; and you may surely receive from him good directions for the shaping of your farther journey into Italy where he did reside, by my choice, some time for the King, after mine own recess from Venice.

I should think that your best line will be through the whole length of France to Marseilles, and thence by sea to Genoa; whence the passage into Tuscany is as diurnal as a Gravesend barge. I hasten, as you do, to Florence or Siena the rather to tell you a short story, from the interest you have given me in your safety.

At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Alberto Scipioni, an old Roman courtier in dangerous times; having been steward to the Duca di Pagliano, who with all his family were strangled, save this only man that escaped by foresight of the tempest. With him I had often much chat of those affairs, into which he took pleasure to look back from his native harbour; and, at my departure toward Rome (which had been the centre of his experience), I had won his confidence enough to beg his advice how I might carry myself there without offence of others or of mine own conscience. '*Signor Arrigo mio*,' says he, '*i pensiri stretti ed il viso sciolto* will go safely over the whole world.' Of which Delphian oracle (for so I have found it) your judgment doth need no commentary; and therefore, Sir, I will commit you, with it, to the best of all securities, God's dear love, remaining.

Your friend, as much to command as any of longer date,

HENRY WOTTON."

Postscript

"Sir: I have expressly sent this my footboy to prevent your departure without some acknowledgement from me of the receipt of your obliging letter; having myself through some business, I know not how, neglected the ordinary conveyance. In any part where I shall understand you fixed. I shall be glad and diligent to entertain you with home-novelties, even for some fomentation of our friendship, too soon interrupted in the cradle."

THE PERSONS

THE ATTENDANT SPIRIT, afterwards in the habit of THYRSIS.

COMUS, with his Crew.

THE LADY.

FIRST BROTHER.

SECOND BROTHER.

SABRINA, the Nymph.

The Chief Persons which presented were:—

The Lord Brackley;
Mr. Thomas Egerton, his Brother;
The Lady Alice Egerton.

COMUS

The first Scene discovers a wild wood.
The ATTENDANT SPIRIT *descends or enters.*

BEFORE the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aerial spirits live insphered
In regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care,
Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants
Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats.
Yet some there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key
That opes the palace of eternity.
To such my errand is; and, but for such,
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds
With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould.
  But to my task. Neptune, besides the sway
Of every salt flood and each ebbing stream,
Took in by lot, 'twixt high and neither Jove,
Imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles
That, like to rich and various gems, inlay
The unadorned bosom of the deep;
Which he, to grace his tributary gods,
By course commits to several government,

And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns
And wield their little tridents. But this Isle,
The greatest and the best of all the main,
He quarters to his blue-haired deities;
And all this tract that fronts the falling sun
A noble Peer of mickle trust and power
Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide
An old and haughty nation, proud in arms:
Where his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore,
Are coming to attend their father's state,
And new-intrusted sceptre; but their way
Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,
The nodding horror of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger;
And here their tender age might suffer peril,
But that by quick command from sovran Jove
I was despatched for their defence and guard!
And listen why; for I will tell you now
What never yet was heard in tale or song,
From old and modern bard, in hall or bower.
  Bacchus, that first from out the purple grape
Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine,
After the Tuscan mariners transformed,
Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed,
On Circe's island fell. (Who knows not Circe,
The daughter of the Sun, whose charmed cup
Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
And downward fell into a grovelling swine?)
This nymph, that gazed upon his clustering locks,
With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth,
Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son
Much like his father, but his mother more,
Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named:
Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,

Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields,
At last betakes him to this omnious wood,
And, in thick shelter of black shades imbowered,
Excels his mother at her mighty art;
Offering to every weary traveller
His orient liquor in a crystal glass,
To quench the drouth of Phœbus; which as they taste
(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst),
Soon as the potion works, their human countenance,
The express resemblance of the gods, is changed
Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,
Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
All other parts remaining as they were.
And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before,
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.
Therefore, when any favoured of high Jove
Chances to pass through this adventurous glade,
Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star
I shoot from heaven, to give him safe convoy,
As now I do. But first I must put off
These my sky-robes spun out of Iris' woof,
And take the weeds and likeness of a swain
That to the service of this house belongs,
Who with his soft pipe, and smooth-dittied song,
Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
And hush the waving woods; nor of less faith,
And in this office of his mountain watch
Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid
Of this occasion. But I hear the tread
Of hateful steps; I must be viewless now.

COMUS *enters, with a charming-rod in one hand, his glass in the other; with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistering : they come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with tortches in their hands.*

Comus. The star that bids the shepherd fold
Now the top of heaven doth hold ;
And the gilded car of day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream ;
And the slope sun his upward beam
Shoots against the dusky pole,
Pacing toward the other goal
Of his chamber in the east.
Meanwhile, welcome joy and feast,
Midnight shout and revelry,
Tipsy dance and jollity.
Braid your locks with rosy twine,
Dropping odours, dropping wine.
Rigour now is gone to bed ;
And Advice with scrupulous head,
Strict Age, and sour Severity,
With their grave saws, in slumber lie.
We that are of purer fire
Imitate the starry quire,
Who, in their nightly watchful spheres,
Lead in swift round the months and years.
The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move ;
And on the tawny sands and shelves
Trip the pert faeries and the dapper elves.
By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,
The wood-nymphs, decked with daisies trim,

Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:
What hath night to do with sleep?
Night hath better sweets to prove;
Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.
Come, let us our rites begin;
'Tis only daylight that makes sin,
Which these dun shades will ne'er report.
Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport,
Dark-veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame
Of midnight torches burns! mysterious dame,
That ne'er art called but when the dragon womb
Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom,
And makes one blot of all the air!
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,
Wherein thou ridest with Hecate, and befriend
Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out;
Ere the blabbing eastern scout,
The nice Morn, on the Indian steep
From her cabined loop-hole peep,
And to the tell-tale Sun descry
Our concealed solemnity.
Come, knit hands, and beat the ground
In a light fantastic round.

The Measure

Break off, break off! I feel the different pace
Of some chaste footing near about this ground.
Run to your shrouds within these brakes and trees;
Our number may affright. Some virgin sure
(For so I can distinguish by mine art)
Benighted in these woods! Now to my charms,
And to my wily trains: I shall ere long
Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed

About my mother Circe. Thus I hurl
My dazzling spells into the spongy air,
Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
And give it false presentments, lest the place
And my quaint habits breed astonishment,
And put the damsel to suspicious flight;
Which must not be, for that's against my course:
I, under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy,
Baited with reasons not unplausible,
Wind me into the easy-hearted man,
And hug him into snares. When once her eye
Hath met the virtue of this magic dust,
I shall appear some harmless villager,
Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.
But here she comes; I fairly step aside,
And hearken, if I may her business hear.

The LADY *enters*

Lady. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,
My best guide now: methought it was the sound
Of riot and ill-managed merriment,
Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,
When, for their teeming flocks and granges full,
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
And thank the gods amiss. I should be loth
To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence
Of such late wassailers; yet, oh! where else
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet
In the blind mazes of this tangled wood?
My brothers, when they saw me wearied out
With this long way, resolving here to lodge
Under the spreading favour of these pines,

Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side
To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit
As the kind hospitable woods provide.
They left me then when the gray-hooded Even,
Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,
Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' vain.
But where they are, and why they came not back,
Is now the labour of my thoughts; 'tis likeliest
They had engaged their wandering steps too far,
And envious darkness, ere they could return,
Had stole them from me: else, O thievish Night,
Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars
That Nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps
With everlasting oils, to give due light
To the misled and lonely traveller?
This is the place, as well as I may guess,
Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear;
Yet nought but single darkness do I find.
What might this me? A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.
These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion, Conscience.
O, welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,
And thou unblemished form of Chastity!
I see ye visibly, and now believe
That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,

Would send a glistering guardian, if need were,
To keep my life and honour unassailed—
Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
I did not err; there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.
I cannot hallo to my brothers, but
Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
I'll venture; for my new-enlivened spirits
Prompt me, and thep perhaps are not far off.

Song

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen
    Within thy airy shell
  By slow Meander's margent green,
And in the violet-embroidered vale
  Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
  That likest thy Narcissus are?
    O, if thou have
  Hid them in some flowery cave,
    Tell me but where,
Sweet Queen of parley, Daughter of the sphere!
  So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all Heaven's Harmonies!
  Comus. Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence.
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,

At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of darkness till it smiled! I have oft heard
My mother Circe with the Sirens three,
Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,
Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs;
Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul,
And lap it in Elysium : Scylla wept,
And child her barking waves into attention,
And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause.
Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense,
And in sweet madness robbed it of itself;
But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,
And she shall be my queen.—Hail, foreign wonder!
Whom certain these rough shades did never breed,
Unless the goddess that in rural shrine
Dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan, by blest song
Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog
To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood.

Lady. Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise
That is addressed to unattending ears:
Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift
How to regain my severed company,
Compelled me to awake the curteous Echo
To give me answer from her mossy couch.

Comus. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?

Lady. Dim darkness, and this leavy labyrinth,

Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?

Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf.

Comus. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?

Lady. To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.
Comus. And left your fair side all unguarded, Lady?
Lady. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.
Comus. Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.
Lady. How easy my misfortune is to hit!
Comus. Imports their loss, beside the present need?
Lady. No less than if I should my brothers lose.
Comus. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?
Lady. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips.
Comus. Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came,
And the swinked hedger at his supper sat.
I saw them under a green mantling vine,
That crawls along the side of yon small hill,
Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;
Their port was more than human, as they stood:
I took it for a faery vision
Of some gay creatures of the element,
That in the colours of the rainbow live,
And play i' the plighted clouds. I was awe-strook,
And, as I passed, I worshipped: if those you seek,
It were a journey like the path to Heaven,
To help you find them.
Lady. Gentle villager,
What readiest way would bring me to that place?
Comus. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.
Lady. To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,
In such a scant allowance of star-light,
Would overtask the best land-pilot's art,
Without the sure guess of well-practised feet.
Comus. I know each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell, or this wild wood,

And every bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood;
And if your stray attendance be yet lodged.
Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark
From her thatched pallet rouse: if otherwise,
I can conduct you, Lady, to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest

Lady. Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest-offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls
And courts of princes, where it first was named,
And yet is most pretended. In a place
Less warranted than this, or less secure.
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.
Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportioned strength! Shepherd, lead on.

[*Exeunt*

Enter the TWO BROTHERS

Elder Brother. Unmuffle, ye faint Stars; and thou, fair Moon,
Thou wont'st to love the traveller's benison,
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,
And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here
In double night of darkness and of shades;
Or, if your influence be quite dammed up
With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,
Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole
Of some clay habitation, visit us
With thy long levelled rule of streaming light,

And thou shalt be our star of Arcady.
Or Tyrian Cynosure.
Second Brother. Or, if our eyes
Be barred that happiness, might we but hear
The folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes,
Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,
Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock
Count the night-watches to his feathery dames,
'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering,
In this close dungeon of innumerous boughs.
But, Oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister!
Where may she wander now, whither betake her
From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistle?
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm
Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.
What if in wild amazement and affright,
Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp
Of savage hunger, or of savage heat!
Eld. Bro. Peace, brother: be not over-exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;
For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
What need a man forestall his date of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid?
Or, if they be but false alarms of fear,
How bitter is such self-delusion!
I do not think my sister so to seek,
Or so unprincipled in virtue's book,
And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,
As that the single want of light and noise
(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,
And put them into misbecoming plight.
Virtue could see to do what Virtue would

By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self
Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all to-ruffled, and sometimes imparied.
He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day:
But he that hides a dark soul, and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.
Second Brother. 'Tis most true
That musing Meditation most affects
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,
Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,
And sits as safe as in a senate-house;
For who would rob a hermit of his weeds,
His few books, or his heads, or maple dish.
Or do his gray hairs any violence?
But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree
Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye,
To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit,
From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.
You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps
Of miser's treasure by an outlaw's den,
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
Danger will wink on Opportunity,
And let a single helpless maiden pass
Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.
Of night or loneliness it recks me not;
I fear the dread events that dog them both,
Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person

Of our unowned sister.
Elder Brother. I do not, brother,
Infer as if I thought my sister's state
Secure without all doubt or controversy;
Yet, where an equal poise of hope and fear
Does arbitrate the event, my nature is
That I incline to hope rather than fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion.
My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine; she has a hidden strength,
Which you remember not.
Second Brother. What hidden strength,
Unless the sttength of Heaven, if you mean that?
Eld. Bro. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength,
Which, if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own.
'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity:
She that has that is clad in complete steel,
And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,
May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,
Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds;
Where, through the sacred rays of chastity,
No savage fierce, bandite, or mountaineer,
Will dare to soil her virgin purity:
Yea, there where very desolation dwells,
By grots and caverns shagged with hurrid shades,
She may pass on with unblenched majesty,
But it not done in pride, or in presumption.
Some say no evil thing that walks by night,
In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,
Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,
That breaks his magic chains at curfew time,
No goblin, or swart faery of the mine,
Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.

Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call
Antiquity from the old schools of Greece
To testify the arms of chastity?
Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,
Fair silver-shafted queen for ever chaste,
Wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness
And spotted mountain-pard, but set at nought
The frivolous bolt of Cupid; gods and men
Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods.
What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield
That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,
Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone,
But rigid looks of chaste austerity,
And noble grace that dashed brute violence
With sudden adoration and blank awe?
So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity,
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear;
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal. But when lust,
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being.
Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp
Oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres,

Lingering and sitting by a new-made grave,
As loth to leave the body that it loved,
And linked itself by carnal sensualty
To a degenerate and degraded state.
Second Brother. How charming is divine Philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast or nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.
Elder Brother. List! list! I hear
Some far-off hallo break the silent air.
Sec. Bro. Methought so too; what should it be?
Elder Brother. For certain,
Either some one, like us, night-foundered here;
Or else some neighbour woodman, or, at worst,
Some roving robber calling to his fellows.
Second Brother. Heaven keep my sister! Again, again, and near!
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.
Elder Brother. I'll hallo.
If he be friendly, he comes well: if not,
Defence is a good cause, and Heaven be for us!
Enter the ATTENDANT SPIRIT *habited like a shepherd*
That hallo I should know. What are you? speak.
Come not too near; you fall on iron stakes else.
Spirit. What voice is that? my young Lord? speak again.
Sec. Bro. O brother, 'tis my father's Shepherd sure.
Eld. Bro. Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed
The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
And sweetened every musk-rose of the dale.
How camest thou here, good swain? hath any ram
Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,

Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?
How couldst thou find this dark squestered nook?
Spirit. O my loved master's heir, and his next joy,
I came not here on such a trivial toy
As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth
Of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth
That doth enrich these downs is worth a thought
To this my errand, and the care it brought.
But, Oh! my virgin Lady, where is she?
How chance she is not in your company?
Elder Brother. To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame
Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.
Spirit. Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.
Elder Brother. What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly shew.
Spirit. I'll tell ye; 'tis not vain or fabulous,
(Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance)
What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly Muse,
Storied of old in high immortal verse
Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles,
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell;
For such there be, but unbelief is blind.
Within the naval of this hideous wood,
Immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells,
Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,
Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries;
And here to every thirsty wanderer
By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,
With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
And the inglorious likeness of a beast
Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage
Charactered in the face. This have I learnt

Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts
That brow this bottom glade; whence night by night
He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl
Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,
Doing abhorred rites to Hecate
In their obscured haunts of inmost bowers.
Yet have they many baits and guileful spells
To inveigle and invite the unwary sense
Of them that pass unweeting by the way.
This evening late, by then the chewing flocks
Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb
Of knot-grars dew-besprent, and were in fold,
I sat me down to watch upon a bank
With ivy canopied, and interwove
With flaunting honeysuckle, and began,
Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,
To meditate my rural minstrelsy,
Till fancy had her fill; but ere a close
The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,
And filled the air with barbarous dissonance;
At which I ceased, and listened them a while,
Till an unusual stop of sudden silence
Grave respite to the drowsy-flighted steeds
That draw the litter of close-curtained Sleep.
At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,
And stole upon the air, that even Silence
Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might
Deny her nature, and be never more,
Still to be so displaced. I was all ear,
And took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of Death: but, Oh! ere long
Too well I did perceive it was the voice
Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister.

Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear;
And 'O poor hapless nightingale,' thought I,
'How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!'
Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste,
Through paths and turnings often trod by day,
Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place
Where that damned wizard, hid in sly disguise
(For so by certain signs I knew), had met
Already, ere my best speed could prevent,
The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey;
Who gently asked if he had seen such two,
Supposing him some neighbour villager.
Longer I durst not stay, but soon guessed
Ye were the two she meant; with that I sprung
Into swift flight, till I had found you here;
But further know I not.

Second Brother. O night and Shades,
How are ye joined with hell in triple knot
Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin,
Alone and helpless! Is this the confidence
You gave me, brother?

Elder Brother. Yes, and keep it still;
Lean on it safely; not a period
Shall be unsaid for me. Against the threats
Of malice or of sorcery, or that power
Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm:
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled;
Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
But evil on itself shall back recoil,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last,
Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,
It shall be in eternal restless change

Self-fed and self-consumed: if this fail,
The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on!
Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven
May never this just sword be lifted up;
But, for that damned magician, let him be girt
With all the griesly legions that troop
Under the sooty flag of Acheron,
Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms
'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out,
And force him to return his purchase back,
Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,
Cursed as his life.

Spirit. Alas! good venturous youth,
I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise;
But here thy sword can do thee little stead:
Far other arms and other weapons must
Be those that quell the might of hellish charms;
He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,
And crumble all thy sinews.

Elder Brother. Why, prithee, Shepherd,
How durst thou then thyself approach so near
As to make this relation?

Spirit. Care and utmost shifts
How to secure the Lady from surprisal
Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad,
Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled
In every virtuous plant and healing herb
That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray:
He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing;
Which when I did, he on the tender grass
Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,
And in requital ope his leathern scrip,
And show me simples of a thousand names,

Telling their strange and vigorous faculties.
Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
But of divine effect, he culled me out;
The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
But in another country, as he said,
Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil:
Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain
Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon;
And yet more med'cinal is it than that Moly
That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave.
He called it Hæmony, and gave it me,
And bade me keep it as of sovran use
'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp,
Or ghastly Furies' apparition.
I pursued it up, but little reckoning made,
Till now that this extremity compelled:
But now I find it true; for by this means
I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised,
Entered the very lime-twigs of his spells,
And yet came off. If you have this about you
(As I will give you when we go) you may
Boldly assault the necromancer's hall;
Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood
And brandished blade rush on him: break his glass,
And shed the luscious liquor on the ground,
But seize his wand; though he and his curst crew
Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,
Or, like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke,
Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

Eld. Bro. Thyrsis, lead on apace; I'll follow thee;
And some good angel bear a shield before us!

The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of delicious: soft music, tables spread with all dainties. COMUS *appears with his rabble, and* THE LADY *set in an enchanted chair; to whom he offers his glass, which she puts by, and goes about to rise.*

Comus. Nay, Lady, sit: if I but wave this wand,
Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster,
And you a statue, or as Daphne was,
Root-bound, that fled Apollo.
Lady. Fool, do not boast:
Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind
With all thy charms, although this corporal rind
Thou hast immanacled, while Heaven sees good.
Comus. Why are you vexed, Lady? why do you frown?
Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates
Sorrow flies far. See, here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns
Brisk as the April buds in primrose season.
And first behold this cordial julep here,
That flames and dances in his crystal bounds,
With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed.
Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone
In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena
Is of such power to stir up joy as this,
To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst,
Why should you be so cruel to yourself,
And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent
For gentle usage and soft delicacy?
But you invert the covenants of her trust,
And harshly deal, like an ill borrower,
With that which you received on other terms,

Scorning the unexempt condition
By which all mortal frailty must subsist,
Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,
That have been tired all day without repast,
And timely rest have wanted ; but, fair virgin,
This will restore all soon.
Lady. 'Twill not, false traitor!
'Twill not restore the truth and honesty
That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies.
Was this the cottage and the safe abode
Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,
These ugly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me!
Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver!
Hast thou betrayed my credulous innocence
With vizored falsehood and base forgery?
And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here
With lickerish baits, fit to ensnare a brute?
Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets,
I would not taste thy treasonous offer: none
But such as are good men can give good things ;
And that which is not good is not delicious
To a well-governed and wise appetite.
Comus. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears
To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,
And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,
Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence!
Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks
Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,
But all to please and sate the curious taste ?
And set to work millions of spinning worms,
That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk,
To deck her sons ; and, that no corner might

Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
She hutched the all-worshipped ore and gems,
To store her children with. If all the world
Should in a pet of temperance feed on pulse,
Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,
The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,
Not half his riches known, and yet despised;
And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth,
And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,
Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,
And strangled with her waste fertility:
The earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with plumes
The herds would over-multitude their lords;
The sea o'efraught would swell, and the unsought diamonds
Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,
And so bestud with stars, that they below
Would grow inured to light, and come at last
To gaze upon the sun with shamelss blows.
List, Lady; be not coy, and be not cozened
With that same vaunted name, Virginity.
Beauty is Nature's coin; must not be hoarded,
But must be current; and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself:
If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languished head.
Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,
Where most may wonder at the workmanship:
It is for homely features to keep home,
They had their name thence; coarse complexions

And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.
What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that,
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn?
There was another meaning in these gifts;
Think what, and be advised; you are but young yet.
Lady. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
In this unallowed air, but that this juggler
Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.
I hate when Vice can bolt her arguments
And Virtue has no tongue to check her pride,
Impostor! do not charge most innocent Nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance; she, good cateress,
Means her provision only to the good,
That live according to her sober laws,
And holy dictate of spare Temperance.
If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportion,
And she no whit encumbered with her store;
And then the Giver would be better thanked,
His praise due paid: for swinish gluttony
Ne'er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,
But with besotted base ingratitude
Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder. Shall I go on?
Or have I said enow? To him that dares
Arm his profane tongue with contemtuous words
Against the sun-clad power of chastity,
Fain would I something say;—yet to what end?

Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend
The sublime notion and high mystery
That must be uttered to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of Virginity;
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
More happiness than this thy present lot.
Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric,
That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence;
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced:
Yet, should I try, the uncontrolled worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,
Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.
Comus. She fables not. I feel that I do fear
Her words set off by some superior power;
And, though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew
Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove
Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus
To some of Saturn's crew. I must dissemble,
And try her yet more strongly.—Come, no more!
This is mere moral babble, and direct
Against the canon laws of our foundation;
I must not suffer this; yet 'tis but the lees
And settlings of a melancholy blood:
But this will cure all straight; one sip of this
Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight
Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste . . . .

The BROTHERS *rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground: his rout make sign of resistance, but are all drive nin.* THE ATTENDANT SPIRIT *comes in.*

Spirit. What! have you let the false enchanter scape?
O ye mistook; ye should have snatched his wand,
And bound him fast: without his rod reversed,
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixed and motionless.
Yet stay: be not disturbed; now I bethink me,
Some other means I have which mav be used,
Which once of Melibœus old I learnt,
The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.
There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,
That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream:
Sabrina is her name : a virgin pure;
Whilom she was the daughter of Locrine,
That had the sceptre from his father Brute.
She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit
Of her enraged stepdame, Guendolen,
Commended her fair innocence to the flood
That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course
The water-nymphs, that in the bottom played,
Held up their pearled wrist, and took her in,
Bearing her straight to aged Nereus' hall ;
Who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head,
And gave her to his daughters to imbathe
In nectared lavers strewed with asphodil,
And through the porch and inlet of each sense
Dropt in ambrosial oils, till she revived,
And underwent a quick immortal change,
Made goddess of the river. Still she retains

Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs
That the shrewd medding elf delights to make,
Which she with precious vialed liquors heals:
For which the shepherds at their festivals
Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,
And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream
Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.
And, as the old swain, said she can unlock
The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell.
If she be right invoked in warbled song;
For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift
To aid a virgin, such as was herself,
In hard-besetting need: this will I try,
And add the power of some adjuring verse.

Song

Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save !
Listen and appear to us,
In name of great Oceanus,
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace ;
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
And the Carpathian wizard's hook;
By scaly Triton's winding shell,
And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell ;

By Leucothea's lovely hands
And her son that rules the strands ;
By Thetis' tinsel-slipperd feet,
And the songs of Sirens sweet;
By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,
And fair Ligea's golden comb,
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks
Sleeking her soft alluring locks;
By all the nymphs that nightly dance
Upon thy streams with wily glance;
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head
From thy coral-paven bed,
And bridle in thy headlong wave,
Till thou our summons answered have.
Listen and save !

SABRINA *rises, attended by Water-nymphs, and sings.*

By the rushy-fringed bank,
Where grows the willow and the osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays,
Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen
Of turkis blue, and emeraled green,
That in the channel strays :
Whilst from off the waters fleet
Thus I set my printless feet
O'er the cowslip's velvet head,
That bends not as I tread.
Gentle swain, at thy request
I am here!

Spirit. Goddess dear,
We implore thy powerful hand
To undo the charmed band
Of true virgin here distressed,
Through the force and through the wile

Of unblessed enchanter vile.
Sabrina. Shepherd, 'tis my office best
To help ensnared chastity:
Brightest Lady, look on me.
Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops that from my fountain pure
I have kept of precious cure;
Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip:
Next this marbled venomed seat,
Smeared with gums of glutinous heat,
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold.
Now the spell hath lost his hold;
And I must haste ere morning hour
To wait in Amphitrite's bower.

SABRINA *descends, and* THE LADY *rises out of seat.*

Spirit. Virgin, daughter of Locrine,
Sprung of old Anchises' line,
May thy brimmed waves for this
Their full tribute never miss
From a thousand petty rills,
That tumble down the snowy hills:
Summer drouth or singed air
Never scorch thy tresses fair,
Nor wet October's torrent flood
Thy molten crystal fill with mud;
May thy billows roll ashore
The beryl and the golden ore;
May thy lofty head be crowned
With many a tower and terrace round,
And here and there thy banks upon
With groves of myrrh and cinnamon.
Come, Lady, while Heaven lends us grace,

Let us fly this cursed place,
Lest the sorcerer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a waste or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground;
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide;
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Father's residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wished presence, and beside
All the swains that their abide
With jigs and rural dance resort ;
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer.
Come, let us haste ; the stars grow high,
But Night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changing, presenting Ludlow Town and the President's Castle: then come in Country Dancers; after them the ATTENDANT SPIRIT, *with the two* BROTHERS *and* THE LADY.

Song

Spirit. Back, shepherds, back ! enough your play,
Till next sun-shine holiday:
Here be, without duck or nod,
Other trippings to be trod
Of lighter toes, and such court guise
As Mercury did first devise
With the mincing Dryades
On the lawns and on the leas.

This second Song presents them to their Father and Mother

Noble Lord, and Lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight;
Here behold so goodly grown
Three fair branches of your own:
Heaven hath timely tried their youth,
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
And sent them here through hard assays
With a crown of deathless praise,
To triumph in victorious dance
O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

The dances ended, the SPIRIT *epiloguizes*

Spirit. To the ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky;
There I suck the liquid air,
All amidst the gardens fair
Of Hesperus, and his daughters three
That sing about the golden tree.
Along the crisped shades and bowers
Revel the spruce and jocund Spring;
The Graces and the rosy-bosomed Hours
Thither all their bounties bring;
There eternal Summer dwells,
And west winds with musky wing
About the cedarn alleys fling
Nard and cassia's balmly smells.
Irish there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue

Than her purfled scarf can shew;
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List, mortals, if your ears be true)
Beds of hyacinth and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound
In slumber soft, and on the ground
Sadly sits the Assyrian queen :
But far above in spangled sheen
Celestial Cupid, her famed son advanced,
Holds his dear Psyche sweet entranced,
After her wandering labours long,
Till free consent the gods among
Make her his eternal bride,
And from her fair unspotted side
Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy ; so Jove hath sworn.
  But now my task is smoothly done:
I can fly, or I can run,
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.
  Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue: she alone is free;
She can teach ye how to chime;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

COMUS

Notes and Explanations

ABBREVIATIONS

A.S.=Anglo-Saxon.

F. or Fr.=French.

Gk.=Greek.

It.=Italian.

L. or Lat.=Latin.

O.C.C.L.=Oxford Companion to Classical Literature.

O.E.D.=Oxford English Dictionary.

Smith or *Smith's Cl. D.*=Smith's Classical Dictionary.

S. D.—discovers, exhibits reveals. *dis*=un ; hence 'uncover.' The word has this meaning very often in Milton and Shakespeare, and it was frequently used in stage-directions (cf. Par. Lost. III, 546) ; cf. several stage-directions in masques etc. e.g. :—

> "Here the heaven opened, and Jove, with the senate of the Gods, was *discovered*, while Apollo returned to his seat, and ascending, sung."
>
> Ben Jonson's '*Masque of Augurs.*'

Note that the stage-directions in Milton are very scanty. Probably Milton left everything to Lawes, and did not worry at all about the representation of his masque on the stage. In this he differs very much from other masque-writers, who rival Shaw himself in the length and fulness of stage-directions. Ben Jonson often writes long paragraphs, giving full details ; Campion, Beaumont, Davenant, do the same. [cf "At this the Dame entered, naked-armed, barefooted, her

frock tucked, her hair knotted, and folded with vipers; in her hand a torch made of a dead man's arm, lighted, girded with a snake" . . . . Ben Jonson's '*Masque of Queens*."]

The Attendant Spirit descends or enters.

Though there was little '*scenery*' in the modern sense in Milton's days, the 'scenes' were often elaborately painted on cloth. The Court-stage was fast adopting the new devices of Inigo Jones, and it was possible for Lawes to have a '*house*' with a hill, wood etc. There was, in many cases, a contrivance for the 'descending' and 'ascending' of gods and goddesses, as also a cellar from which they could 'rise.' (cf. l. 890 "Sabrina *rises* . . . . ")

At the first performance of *Comus* at Ludlow Castle, the entry of the spirit was accompanied by music—(mentioned in the Bridgewater MS. of *Comus*). Lawes began the performance with his captivating music. The song he sang was the passage (ll. 976-1011) reserved by the poet for the close. The necessary changes were, of course, made.

The Attendant Spirit, in a very long speech, introduces Comus to the audience, and also performs the more practical 'task' of explaining the occasion of the Masque. The speech has also been utilised for paying compliments to the Earl of Bridgewater, his children, and the people of Wales. The Attendant Spirit, who is omniscient like Prospero, explains the nature of the action in the masque. The speech reminds us of the 'prologue' (*prologos*) of a Greek tragedy, which usually sets forth the problem and the situation from which the drama starts. Shakespeare has a 'prologue' in his '*Troilus and Cressida*.'

The first paragraph of the speech has often been praised: it stands in bold contrast to the usual opening speech of a masque. It is equally removed in tone from the dainty songs of Ben Jonson and the Senecan fury of Davenant. It at once suggests that *Comus* will be different from the traditional *masque* and that the writer is a great artist, interested in high principles. The moral is brought home even at the very beginning: for, is it not better to leave 'the smoke and

stir of this dim spot which men call Earth' for 'the crown that Virtue gives, ... amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats'?

1. *Starry*, Inlaid with bright stars.

Jove's Court, The palace of Jove. Jove (Jupiter) was the greatest god in classical mythology. 'Jupiter' literally means 'father Jove' (from L. *Jovis pater*).

2. *those* in the sense of well-known or certainly existing. This use of *those* is said to be after the Latin use of *ille*. Cf. the colloquial use of 'your'.

immortal shapes, heavenly forms or Angels.

3. *aerial*, belonging to the air *i.e.* living in the air.

Spirits, Incorporeal beings, contrasted with human beings.

insphered, in their respective spheres. A reference to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, which Milton adopts also in *Paradise Lost*. The system of Ptolemy (2nd cent. A.D.) was superseded by that of Copernicus, as the Copernican system may be superseded by those of Einstein and others. Ptolemy regarded the earth as the centre of the universe, surrounded by many spheres.

4. *Serene*, used in its original Latin sense, *serenus*= bright, clear. Cf. Gray's *Elegy* :—

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene."

5. *dim spot*, the little dark earth ; *dim* implies a contrast with *serene*.

6. *low-thoughted care*, care about 'lower' thoughts i.e., of worldly things. Pope borrowed this beautiful phrase, among many others. (Cf. *Eloisa to Abelard.*)

7. *pestered*, imprisoned, as stray cattle are in a 'pinfold.'

pinfold, enclosure for strayed cattle.

7-8. Note the alliteration.

9. *crown*, often mentioned in the Bible ; here it means the highest glory.

9. introduces the central idea of *Comus*—the praise of Virtue.

9-10. Cf. *Revelation* iv. 4. Milton speaks of the bliss offered to the virtuous both by classical mythology, and the Bible. Milton creates almost a new mythology for himself, by frequently mentioning together both pagan and Christian Mythologies.

10. *mortal change*, Variously interpreted. "Hastily it may be read as if it meant 'death'; but rather it seems to mean 'this mortal state of life'"—Masson. Probably the idea is best expressed in *Hamlet*, III, i, 67—

"When we have shuffled off this mortal coil."

11. *amongst . . . . seats*—Note the construction. Inversion of 'gods enthroned on . . . . *sainted seats*' refers to the seats meant for saints. Milton, it is suggested, must have had in mind the following passage from *Revelation*, iv, 4— " . . . .round about the throne were four and twenty seats and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold." The earlier lines, however, derive a good deal from the classical conception of heaven, as found e.g. in Homer's *Odyssey*.

1-11. Note the promise of unending bliss to worshippers of Virtue.

12. *be*, are ; this form was frequently used in Elizabethan times and persisted to the days of Milton.

13. *Just*, Righteous.

13. *golden key*, cf. *Lycidas*, 110-11.

Two massy keys he bore, of metals twain,

The golden opes, the iron shuts amain."

The phrase may be interpreted literally here, in view of the reference in *Lycidas*, which expresses the common belief. The phrase is used metaphorically very frequently. For an interesting note on the use of the phrase by other poets, see Verity.

15. *For such*, described above.

16. *ambrosial weeds*, immortal clothes or dress; 'ambrosial' used in its original, Greek sense. 'Ambrosia' is more commonly used in the sense of the food of the gods.

17. *rank vapours .... mould*, The foul atmosphere of this sinful earth; or the foul contact with an earthly body, that the Spirit detests. *Mould* means either the earth, or body; cf. *Hamlet*. II, 2, 293-4. "This most excellent Canopy, the air, ... appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours."

18-45. The Attendant Spirit speaks of its 'task'—and explains the purpose and the occasion of the masque. The lines pay graceful compliments to England, Wales, and also to the Earl of Bridgewater.

18. *Neptune*, The God of the Sea. The universe, according to Greek mythology has three rulers. Zeus rules over 'the wide heaven,' Poseidon over 'the hoary sea' and Hades over the under-world, or 'the murky darkness.' All the three were sons of Cronus and Rhea. Neptune is the Roman name of Poseidon.

19. *salt flood .... stream*, all oceans and rivers. *Salt flood* refers to the sea.

20. *took in by lot*, obtained as his share; as described in Homer's *Iliad*. See note on l. 18.

'twixt ... .Jove, between Jupiter (Zeus) and Pluto (Hades)—the ruler of heaven, and the ruler of hades. Neptune rules over islands because the region between heaven and hades is his dominion.

21-23. Islands are the gems set in the bosom of the ocean: a picturesque image indeed, perhaps suggested by Shakespeare's famous description of England in *Richard* II, ii. 1. 46-8.

> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house ....

21. *sea-girt*, surrounded on all sides by the sea—as by a girdle.

24. *grace . . . . gods*, to honour lesser deities—the 'assistants' of Neptune, who has the 'imperial' or supreme rule. Cf. l. 21.

25. *by course . . . . government*, entrusts, by turns, to them ('tributary gods').

26-27. Neptune graciously allows them to wear the insignia of royalty.

26. *sapphire crown*, 'Sapphire' indicates 'blue'. It is natural that lords of the sea should wear blue crowns.

27. *tridents*, three-pronged sceptres. The trident is the sceptre of Neptune. (L. *tri*—three, *dens*—tooth).

this Isle i.e. Great Britain.

28. Note the patriotic sentiment.

29. *quarters*, entrusts or assigns.

blue-haired deities, The colour of the ocean is attributed to the hair of the rulers (deities). Masson has offered a guess. "Can there be a recollection of 'blue' as the British colour, inherited from the old times of the blue-stained Britons who fought with Cæsar?"

30. *tract . . . . sun*, that faces the setting sun—i.e. where the sun sinks into the West. The tract, therefore, is the western part of England ; here Wales.

31. *noble Peer*, The Earl of Bridgewater, who was present on the occasion, and in whose honour the masque was performed. Personal compliments, sometimes approaching flattery, are very frequent in masques. Jonson's masques are full of them. See *Intro*.

mickle, great, much.

32. *tempered awe*, awe or dignity softened by kindness ; a fine combination of sternness and leniency.

33. *an old . . . .arms*, Wales. The line will obviously appeal to the Welsh among the audience. It is a good tribute to the war-like traditions of the Celts.

34. *fair offspring*, *i.e.* two sons and a daughter.

nursed . . . . lore, highly-educated.

36. *new-intrusted sceptre*, newly vested authority. Refers to the Earl's appointment as Lord-Lieutenant. See *Intro*.

36-39. The 'fair offspring' had to pass through a wild wood in which they might lose their way. The lines become very significant, if we attach importance to the traditional origin of *Comus* viz. the story that the young Lady Alice Egerton and her two brothers were detained by night in Haywood Forest, near Ludlow. See *Intro*.

37. *perplexed*, entangled or intricate. Accented here on the first syllable.

38. *nodding . . . . brows*, The trees with their deep shadows and shaking in the wind inspire awe and terror. Note the personification. 'Horror' denotes both bristling and shuddering. [L. *horres* = bristle, shudder at.]

41. *But that*, Were it not that.

Sovran, Supreme ; cf. sovereign.

43. *I will . . . .now*, The Spirit addresses the audience. This no doubt breaks the dramatic illusion, but it is necessary to remember that the masque included many devices and tricks, which are not strictly dramatic. Thus, addressing the audience was not infrequent, and in some earlier masques, the masquers chose partners for dancing from the audience. Even in public theatres there was great intimacy between the actors and the audience, mainly because of the peculiar nature of the stage. It is well-known how dandies could occupy seats even *on* the stage in the days of Shakespeare. Moreover masques were often for private performances, and admitted only a select audience. See *Intro*.

44-45. A claim to originality, mostly conventional. It need not be mistaken for boastful pride. Verity quotes parallels from Horace, and we have a similar thought in *Paradise Lost* (l. 16).

'Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.'

45.—reminds us of Minstrels, singing their lays in noblemen's Castles. Hall = the big room in a castle or palace where all could assemble ; bower = private room, usuall

for ladies. A conventional phrase, used by Spenser and Scott. Cf. Wordsworth's Sonnet *Milton*—l. 4.

"*. . . . the heroic wealth of hall and bower.*"

46-91. The Spirit introduces Comus as the son of Bacchus, the God of Wine, and of Circe, the famous enchantress. All the characteristics that Milton wants to associate with Comus are suggested in these lines.

46. *Bacchus,* Also known as Dionysus, the God of Wine and Revels. In classical mythology many legends are associated with Bacchus. Milton here refers to one of them.

47-50. Milton is referring to a legend about Bacchus mentioned in a Homeric Hymn and by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* III). "The Seventh Homeric Hymn relates that he was seized and bound by Tyrrhenian pirates ; but the bonds fell off him, a vine grew about the mast, and the captive turned into a lion. The pirates in terror jumped into the sea and were *transformed* into dolphins" (O.C.C.L.) Note that Milton adds to the legend by saying that 'he fell on Circe's island.' The reason is obvious. *Homeric Hymns*, it should be observed, are *not* by Homer, but by unknown authors. Most of them are invocations to different gods. Homer himself has very little to say of Bacchus. *Tyrrhene shore* is the coast of Etruria, and the *Tyrrhenians* are also known as Etruscans. They dwelt in the north-western part of Italy, and a part of the Mediterranean was named the *Tyrrhene sea*.

50. *Circe's island,* Aeæa, situated in the stream Oceanus, according to the *Odyssey*. Circe was a great sorceress and enchantress, and when Odysseus (Ulysses) visited her island, she turned his companions into swine. Milton represents Bacchus as visiting Ææa after his adventure in order to make the parentage of Comus more plausible. Note Milton's myth-making capacity, and also his attempt to make the character of Comus consistent with his heredity.

50-53. cf. Note on Circe. The influence of the famous enchantress was irresistible, as is shown by the plight of Ulysses companions. Ulysses saved himself with the help of a magic herb. The fame of Circe is glanced at only to

emphasise the nature of the achievement of her son who 'excels his mother at her mighty art.'

51. *daughter of the Sun,* Greek mythology regards Circe as the daughter of Helios (the Sun-God).

53. *Fell . . . . swine*, was transformed into an ugly pig.

54. *Clustering locks*, Bacchus is usually represented as a youth of great beauty, with luxuriant hair, and with grapes or a winecup in his hand. (O.C.C.L.)

55. *blithe*, Gay, joyous.

57. Comus takes more after his mother (Circe) than after his father (Bacchus). He inherits from his mother not only a bewitching personality, but also a knowledge of magic.

59. *frolic*, mirthful, sportive. Cf. German *fröhlich*.

60. wandering over France and Spain ; Milton chooses the unfamiliar names to suit the classical context.

59-63. 'Comus, being a full-grown, gay youth, has, after wandering over France and Spain, chosen this ominous forest as his abode ; and in this wood, where light can hardly penetrate, he tries to compete with his mother in her arts ; and also excels her.'

61. *ominous*, "full of omens" or portents ; suggesting dark or mysterious possibilities.

62. creates a mysterious atmosphere about Comus's abode, and prepares us for what follows.

65. *orient*, bright, shining. (L. *orior*—rise)

66. *drouth of Phœbus*, thirst (or dryness), caused by the Sun. *Phœbus*—Greek Sun-God.

66-72. Note the construction, somewhat clumsy and also ungrammatical ; it is suggested that this may be due to the influence of Latin. The lines describe the effect on poor mortals, produced by the liquor offered by Comus. They are metamorphosed into queer animals, with heads of beasts and trunks of men. Such queer animals are mentioned in

all mythologies. Milton has obviously in view the transformation of the companions of Ulysses brought about by Circe. But the victims of the potion given by Comus are changed only into half-beasts. They will appear, therefore, like Bottom (*A Mid-Summer Night's Dream*) with the head alone transformed. Homer allows Circe's victims to retain the power of their mind : but the diabolical power of Comus, according to Milton is so complete that his victims boast themselves more comely than before. Milton emphatically brings out how deadly is the pleasure that Comus offers.

67. *fond*, foolish.

68-9. *their human . . . . gods*, resembling gods in their faces. cf. P.L. III, 44.

". . . . or human face divine."

71. *ounce*, a kind of lynx, a feline wild beast.

hog, swine.

72. *other parts*, the rest of the body.

74. *disfigurement*, usually, blemish ; here, more literally, loss of proper figure or face.

75. like drunkards imagining themselves kings.

76. cf. *Lotos-Eaters* by Tennyson.

77. To lead the life of swine—forgetting what makes man different from beasts. *Sensual sty* suggests a life full of vice, like that of a voluptuary. *Sty*—enclosure for pigs.

79. *adventurous glade*, glade with possibilities of adventure, dangerous.

80. Note the alliteration, and the beautiful simile.

glancing star—a shooting-star. The line suggests speed, mainly because of its rhythm.

81. *convoy*, escort.

82. *sky-robes*, cf. *ambrosial weeds* (l. 16).

spun . . . . woof, Iris was the goddess of the rainbow ; the robes, therefore, possessed the hues of the rainbow.

Woof (crossthreads) denotes material ; perhaps, fine gaudy robes.

84. *weeds*, dress. cf. widow's weeds.

swain, a rustic, peasant ; frequent in pastorals.

85-88. A compliment to Lawes, especially to his musical talents, put into his own mouth ; for Lawes played the part of the Spirit. Cf. Milton's 'Sonnet to H. Lawes.'

85. Lawes was music-master to the family of the Earl of Bridgewater.

87-8. Music is always supposed to possess some supernatural powers. Cf. Dryden's *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*, and the classical legend about Orpheus. (also P. L. VII 30 et. seq.)

88. *nor of less faith*, as faithful as he is skilled in music.

89-92. *And in . . . occasion*, because he is a swain watching the flocks on the mountain, his is the most readily available help if occasion demands it. *Likeliest*=most fitting.

92. *hateful steps*, of Comus and his followers.

viewless, invisible.

S.D.—Several points mentioned in the stage-direction here are omitted in the *Cambridge MS.*

Though there is no definite change of scene, (for the scene of action is the wild wood till 1. 658) there is a sudden change in the general atmosphere. Comus, whose achievements and potentiality are described and suggested in the speech of the Attendant Spirit, appears with his charming-rod and glass. His followers, who have already suffered a transformation, and carry heads of beasts on their shoulders, add to the strangeness of the atmosphere. The dazzling robes and the flaming torches, with the quaintly dressed magician in the centre, emphasise the spectacular interest of the scene—one of the essential characteristics of the masque.

Though the gaiety and lightness of tone make this part of the poem (from the entry of Comus to the entry of the

Lady) resemble the traditional anti-masque, it must be observed that for an anti-masque it is far too serious. Milton was not meant for the comic vein, and he himself seems to be always conscious of it. This interlude, as well as some of the later parts of the poem could have been made full of rollicking fun by other masque-writers. It is not even necessary to dwell too much on its resemblance with the anti-masque, for Milton's masque is really *sui generis*. (See *Intro.*)

The change of atmosphere is also suggested by the change in metre. The metre now used is more adapted to the lighter vein. The shorter lines echo a tripping, dancing movement. (*Intro.*)

The song of Comus reminds us of *L'Allegro*. Comus is by no means an ugly apostle of vice ; on the other hand, as Johnson notes, 'the invitations to pleasure are so general that they excite no distinct images of corrupt enjoyment, and take no dangerous hold on the fancy.'

Rout, a band.

glistering, shining with brilliant colours.

93. *star*, the evening-star, Vesper or Hesperus (Venus) ; referred to by Collins (*Ode to Evening*) as "the folding star' ; the morning star (Phosphorus) being called by Shakespeare 'the unfolding star' (*Measure for Measure*, IV, 2, 218).

93. The star that makes the shepherd put his sheep into the fold (as it is night).

95-97. The sun's chariot cools its hot axles. The sun-god (Apollo or Phoebus) was represented in classical mythology as riding in a chariot drawn by powerful horses. (Cf. Indian mythology.) *allay*=cool. Perhaps there is a reference to the classical belief that the sun's chariot, glowing hot, produced a hissing sound in the Atlantic Ocean, when the wheels touched it.

97. *steep*, deep.

98. *slope*, disappearing below the horizon.

98-101. These lines describe the sun's passage from the west back to the east. *Dusky pole*, the dark north pole.

The sun is busy riding again under the earth towards the east.

102-4. cf. *L'Allegro* esp. 25-26. *feast*, festivity.

105. *locks*, followers of Comus will have long hair, like Bacchi (followers of Bacchus). It is interesting to note that the Cavaliers also wore long hair, and were thus distinguished from 'Roundheads'.

rosy twine, with roses entwined into garlands.

106. fragrant, and moist with wine.

107-9. Milton's poems abound in the personifications of abstractions—especially the early poems. The poets of the eighteenth century almost worship abstractions in poetry. If brevity is the soul of poetry, abstractions help a great deal.

107. *Rigour*, rigourous (strictly moral) persons; *Advice*, i.e. persons given to moralising or giving free advice, etc.

110. *saws*, sayings, copybook-maxims. In the oft-quoted description of the 'seven ages' of man (*As You Like It*) we have 'full of wise saws and modern instances.'

111. A reference to the simple theory that the Universe —(and everything in it)—is composed of four elements—fire, air, earth and water. Cf. the theory of four humours or complexions. *Of purer fire* = not earthly, but divine.

112. *starry quire*, music of the stars; 'the music of the spheres'; each star or sphere was supposed to sing. Shakespeare uses this notion very frequently, especially in *The Merchant of Venice*, V.

> "*There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st*
> *But in his motion like an angel sings.*"

113-4. that keep watch by night and dance in swift circles or revolutions etc. Cf. P.L. VII 339 et seq.

> Let there be Lights
> High in th' expanse of Heaven to divide
> The Day from Night; and let them be for Signes,
> For Seasons, and for Dayes, and circling Years.

115. *sounds*, straits of the sea.

finny drove, fish; fish have fins; *drove*=collection, usually a herd.

116. The moon attracts the waters of the sea : and thus the sea, with the fish, appears to be dancing an 'undulating dance.' *morrice*, morris or Moorish dance.

117. *tawny*, dark-yellow.

shelves, slopes ; banks of rivers.

118. *trip*, dance; *dapper*—finely or neatly dressed ; *elves*—mischievous little fairies.

120. *wood-nymphs*, nymphs in Greek mythology are female personifications of natural objects—usually represented as beautiful, gay, fond of music etc. Wood-nymphs were called Dryads ; cf. Naiads (of rivers, springs etc.) and Oreads (of mountains).

121. *wakes*, vigils ; merry-making by night ; 'wake' originally referred to the feast of the dedication of a church, kept by watching (keeping awake) all night.

122. Expresses the view of pleasure-seekers.

115-22. The lines are an illustration of Milton's description of Nature. Note the 'literary', artificial style—especially 'finny drove', 'dapper elves', 'dimpled brook' etc.

124. *Venus*, The association of Venus with love is very old. Here the reference is both to the planet and the Goddess of Love.

126-7. Daylight makes all our actions visible to others, and they condemn of them as sins ; but the darkness of the night hides them all. The thought is rather cynical—nothing is sinful if it is not detected. *Dun-*, dusky or dark.

128-30. Cotytto was a Thracian goddess ; festivals in her honour were celebrated by night, and usually included licentious orgies. *The secret . . . . burns*—the worship was performed with a great deal of secrecy.

130. *mysterious dame*; because the goddess was veiled and worshipped only at midnight.

The sun is busy riding again under the earth towards the east.

102-4. cf. *L'Allegro* esp. 25-26. *feast*, festivity.

105. *locks*, followers of Comus will have long hair, like Bacchi (followers of Bacchus). It is interesting to note that the Cavaliers also wore long hair, and were thus distinguished from 'Roundheads'.

rosy twine, with roses entwined into garlands.

106. fragrant, and moist with wine.

107-9. Milton's poems abound in the personifications of abstractions—especially the early poems. The poets of the eighteenth century almost worship abstractions in poetry. If brevity is the soul of poetry, abstractions help a great deal.

107. *Rigour*, rigourous (strictly moral) persons; *Advice*, i.e. persons given to moralising or giving free advice, etc.

110. *saws*, sayings, copybook-maxims. In the oft-quoted description of the 'seven ages' of man (*As You Like It*) we have 'full of wise saws and modern instances.'

111. A reference to the simple theory that the Universe —(and everything in it)—is composed of four elements—fire, air, earth and water. Cf. the theory of four humours or complexions. *Of purer fire* = not earthly, but divine.

112. *starry quire*, music of the stars; 'the music of the spheres'; each star or sphere was supposed to sing. Shakespeare uses this notion very frequently, especially in *The Merchant of Venice*, V.

> "*There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st*
> *But in his motion like an angel sings.*"

113-4. that keep watch by night and dance in swift circles or revolutions etc. Cf. P.L. VII 339 et seq.

> Let there be Lights
> High in th' expanse of Heaven to divide
> The Day from Night; and let them be for Signes,
> For Seasons, and for Dayes, and circling Years.

115. *sounds*, straits of the sea.

finny drove, fish ; fish have fins ; *drove*=collection, usually a herd.

116. The moon attracts the waters of the sea : and thus the sea, with the fish, appears to be dancing an 'undulating dance.' *morrice*, morris or Moorish dance.

117. *tawny*, dark-yellow.

shelves, slopes ; banks of rivers.

118. *trip*, dance ; *dapper*—finely or neatly dressed ; *elves*—mischievous little fairies.

120. *wood-nymphs*, nymphs in Greek mythology are female personifications of natural objects—usually represented as beautiful, gay, fond of music etc. Wood-nymphs were called Dryads ; cf. Naiads (of rivers, springs etc.) and Oreads (of mountains).

121. *wakes*, vigils ; merry-making by night ; 'wake' originally referred to the feast of the dedication of a church, kept by watching (keeping awake) all night.

122. Expresses the view of pleasure-seekers.

115-22. The lines are an illustration of Milton's description of Nature. Note the 'literary', artificial style—especially 'finny drove', 'dapper elves', 'dimpled brook' etc.

124. *Venus*, The association of Venus with love is very old. Here the reference is both to the planet and the Goddess of Love.

126-7. Daylight makes all our actions visible to others, and they condemn of them as sins ; but the darkness of the night hides them all. The thought is rather cynical—nothing is sinful if it is not detected. *Dun-*, dusky or dark.

128-30. Cotytto was a Thracian goddess ; festivals in her honour were celebrated by night, and usually included licentious orgies. *The secret . . . . burns*—the worship was performed with a great deal of secrecy.

130. *mysterious dame* ; because the goddess was veiled and worshipped only at midnight.

131. *called*, invoked. *dragon . . . darkness.* The chariot of the night was supposed to be drawn by dragons, Shakespeare refers to the dragons of the Night more than once. (*Cymbeline* II 248, and also *A. Mid-Summer Night's Dream.*) But see the next note.

Stygian, from Styx, the principal river of the underworld or Hades. In the fable of Cupid and Psyche, Styx is said to be guarded by dragons. This perhaps suggested the epithet 'dragon'.

spets, spits, sends forth.

129-33. 'mysterious lady (Cotytto) that is invoked only when the horrible essence of infernal Darkness spits utter gloom, and creates an all-pervading dark mass'.

134. *cloudy*, entirely enveloped in clouds. *Ebon*—black like ebony.

135. *Hecate*, Goddess of ghosts, magic, witchcraft etc., associated with the underworld. In *Macbeth* she is the queen of Hell, and the patroness of the Three Witches.

135. Note that Cotytto and Hecate are riding together, and thus both licentiousness and black magic can hold complete sway over the universe !

138-42. A necessary caution on the part of Comus. He wants to finish all nocturnal sports before the tell-tale sun is seen in the East.

138-39. *blabbing . . . . Morn*, The Morn (dawn) precedes the Sun, and is thus a 'scout'—i.e. one sent out to reconnoitre. *blabbing*, indiscreet in talk ; *nice* in the sense of prudish, fastidious.

139. *Indian*, Eastern in general.

139-40. A very beautiful image. The Dawn is spoken of as a nice, little prude, peeping out of an opening in her cabin, only to detect the sins of the world.

141, *tell-tale*, easily revealing ; *descry*, reveal.

138-41. According to Mr. Verity these lines are 'a little mosaic of Shakespearian touches.'

143. *knit hands*, join hands ; *round*, a country dance. *fantastic* fanciful ; here probably spectacular.

144. Cf. *L'Allegro* 34-5.

> 'Come, and trip it as Ye go
> On the light fantastic toe !'

S. D. *The Measure ;* Dances always were an integral part of masques. (See *Intro.*) *Measure* is any stately dance, usually slower than other dances.

145. *break off*, stop dancing. Cf. 'knite hands.'

145-6. Comus detects the approach of Virtue even from the sound of footsteps ; Vice must indeed be mortally afraid of Virtue !

147. *shrounds*, places for hiding ; *breaks*, bushes.

148. *Our . . . affright*, We may frighten the 'chaste' intruder, for we are far too many.

149-50. Milton prepares the audience for the entry of the Lady. *benighted*, overtaken by night.

151. *wily trains*, cunning allurements.

151-3. Comus is glad to have more victims ; he wants to excel his mother Circe by transforming many more men into monsters. He enjoys and admires his own wicked arts.

153-4. These words would be accompanied by action—Comus flinging some 'dazzling spells' from his hand. In l. 165, we come across 'this magic dust.' The actor, therefore, may fling some powder into the air and synchronise his action, as Masson suggests, 'with a flash of coloured light.' *spongy*, receiving and retaining like a sponge.

155. Capable of deceiving the eyes with illusion ; *blear*, deceptive, bluring.

156. Giving what we call 'optical allusions'.

157. Comus discards his magician's garb (l. 166) and appears to the Lady as 'a gentle shepherd' (l. 271).

160-4. A good description of the general doings of Comus. It is extremely striking that Iago can describe himself in these very words of Milton. Under pretence of

friendship, and with flattering words and cogent argument, Comus (like Iago) can work upon any mortal.

friendly ends, friendly aims, or purposes. *glozing*, flattering, of speaking falsehood.

baited, tempted with a bait ; *wind*, ingratiate with.

hug . . . snares, lead him into a pitfall.

163. *wind me*, worm myself into his favour and gain his confidence.

166-7. to explain the late hours that he is keeping ; a thrifty shepherd must needs work by night !

country gear, Villager's work ; *gear* usually means 'tackle', or tools ; loosely used for 'affair', business work ; see O. E. D.

168-9. The 1673 edn. omits l. 168, interchanges 168 and 169, and substitutes 'hear' for 'here' of the 1645 edn. This makes little difference in the sense ; but line 167 is too good to be omitted. It supplies what Comus himself would call 'a reason not unplausible' for his presence in the wood.

S. D. Milton does not even name 'the Lady', showing that he is not much bent on dramatic characterisation. The Lady personifies in herself many virtues, especially Chastity. At Ludlow Castle, the part was played by the Lady Alice Egerton, who possessed all the beauty that the poet or Lawes could have desired. She is also said to have possessed a very sweet voice, and her song must have immensely added to the beauty of the masque.

171. *my best guide* ; In fact, her only guide is her 'ear' as she can see nothing in the dark.

172. The Lady also is as shrewd as Comus.

173-7. Expresses the views of Virtue about the mid-night revelry of Comus. Milton indirectly refers here to a shearing-feast, but his picture is far from complimentary to a shepherd. Far a charming picture of the beauty of a shearing feast, see *Winter's Tale*, IV.

173. *jocund*, merry, sprightly ; *gamesome*, sportive.

174. *loose . . . hinds*, a contemptuous reference to the ignorant, disorderly peasants ; *hinds*, peasants.

175. *teeming*, abundant. *granges*, granaries, barns.

176. *Wanton*, wild and uncontrolled.

176. *bounteous*, generous, kind. *Pan*, the Greek god of shepherds, flocks, hunters etc., partly goat-like in form.

177. *amiss*, in a wrong manner.

175-7. The Lady rightly protests against thanksgiving that merely serves as an excuse for riotous merriment.

178. *swilled insolence*, insolence aggravated by drinking. *swill*, drink greedily like animals.

179. *wassailers*, revellers.

180. *inform*, instruct, guide.

179-80. being unacquainted with the wood, she is quite helpless by night.

181. *blind mazes*, obscure labyrinths, leading one knows not where. (Cf. ' blind alley ').

182-94. The Lady narrates how she lost her way.

183. *lodge*, pass the night : *under . . . . pine's*, under the ' favourable ' shelter offered by the spreading branches etc.

188. *then when*, emphatic, like the double negative.

gray-hooded Even, Evening wears a grey hood like ' a sad votarist ' i.e. a sober, devout, pilgrim ; *hood* upper garment, e.g. of a monk. *grey* denotes the twilight.

189. *palmer's weed*, dress worn by a pilgrim. *palmer*, a pilgrim, so called because it was customary to return with a palm-branch from the Holy Land. (Cf, Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, l. 13).

190. They left her in the wood as the sun was setting. *Phoebus' wain*, the Sun's chariot.

188-90. 'They left me when the grey evening twilight following the sun's chariot closely, and thus looking like a

sober devotee in a palmer's dress, was first seen'. The lines contain a fine image. See the excellent note in Masson III, 264.

193. *engaged*, ventured, *wandering steps*, example of *hypallage* or transferred epithet.

194-5. Darkness grew jealous of the Lady and stole her brothers ; an innocent conceit.

196. *felonious end*, some evil purpose.

197. *dark lantern*, a lantern which can, if necessary, hide the light from the gazer's eye such as a *robber* would carry

195-8. Night is compared to a theif carrying a 'dark lantern' in which she can hide the stars when necessary. Thus the stars are prevented from doing their normal function—to shine (like lamps) for travellers. The comparison is obviously a far-fetched one, and may be called a poetic conceit. The 'metaphysical' poetry of the seventeenth century (of e.g. Donne, or Crashaw) abounds in such conceits. Mr. Stopford Brooke strongly condemns these lines—(*Milton* p. 24)—"Nothing", says he, "can be worse in conception than the comparison of night to a theif who shuts up, for the sake of his felony, the stars whose lamps burn everlasting oil, in his dark lantern."

203. *rife*, prevailing, current.

perfect . . . . ear, perfectly i.e. distinctly audible.

204. *single darkness*, total darkness.

204. *might*, could, as in Chaucer.

205-9. A very good summary of the common superstitious beliefs. Superstition, like tradition, dies hard, and the lines remind us of the innumerable allusions to superstitions in the plays of Shakespeare, and other Elizabethan writers. In fact, as Mr. Browne remarks, "*The Tempest* may well have suggested the whole imagery".

207. *calling shapes*, ghost-like shapes that beckon and speak like the ghost of Hamlet's father.

beckoning shadows dire, A noun placed between two adjectives is frequent in Milton—said to be due to the influence of Greek. In French, the adjective follows the noun.

208. *airy tongues*, sounds issuing from the air.

syllable, call out distinctly.

209. i.e. in all conceivable places.

205-9. Note the vague suggestions in the lines. They create such an uncanny atmosphere that (with the Lady) we are ready for *any* manifestation of the supernatural.

210-13. 'Conscience' doth save us all!

212. *Siding*, keeping company, ready to defend.

213-5. Note the personification of abstract virtues.

pure-eyed, clear-eyed. Faith with unblurred eyes.

white-handed, pure, unsullied.

girt, girdled or furnished with.

unblemished, that can never be defiled or sullied.

Chastity, The poem is primarily in praise of Chastity; and so Milton substitutes Chastity in place of Charity in the usual Trinity of Faith, Hope and Charity. *chastity*=purity of body and soul.

216. *Ye*, you (obj.)

217. *Supreme*, accented on the first syllable.

Supreme Good, i.e. God.

217-20. God, to whom all evil things are but obedient agents for punishing the evil-doers, will, if need arises, send an angel etc. Even evil serves a purpose in this world—it is an instrument of punishment. The Lady is confident that Virtue is unassailable. God himself will protect the Virtuous, if there is no human aid. The sentiment belongs to all religions, and that a Puritan like Milton endows an innocent virgin with this ennobling thought, is quite natural.

221. *sable*, dark.

221-4. Note the repetition. *silver lining*, the edge that shines. cf. 'no cloud without a silver lining' used as a proverb. The repetition emphasises the strong hope that the Lady cherishes. The 'silver lining' proves that God is listening to her devout declaration of Faith.

225. *tufted*, bushy.

228. *new-enlivened spirits*, i.e. in which hope has been newly instilled by the 'silver lining.' Her courage is revived by the gleam of the moon-light in the midst of the clouds.

229. *they*, i.e. her brothers.

S. D. *Song*: The first beautiful song in the masque memorable alike for its sweet music and appropriate subject matter. The Lady invokes Echo because of the special gift that Echo possesses, viz., of repeating what others say. (see *Intro*.).

230. *Echo*. A mountain nymph. "A nymph who by her chattering prevented Hera from surprising her husband Zeus in the company of the Nymphs. Hera punished her by making it impossible for her either to speak first, or to be silent when anyone else was speaking. She loved the beautiful Narcissus, but in vain, and pined away in grief till nothing remained of her but her voice." (*Dict. of Classical Antiquities* by Seyffert, Nettleship, and Sandys).

231. *airy shell*—variously interpreted; one interpretation is "the hollow vault of the atmosphere" (*Masson* III 266); perhaps, invisible (in the air) home (shell).

232. Note the music, created with the help of liquids. Milton locates Echo's home. *Meander*, a river in Asia Minor, said to have a very winding course. This fact gives us the word '*meander*.' Classical mythology does not associate the river with Echo *margent*, margin, (poet).

232-3. 'By the green banks of the Meander or in a valley adorned by violets.

233. Mr. Scott in his edition of *Comus* has a long note on this line. "A valley in the neighbourhood of Athens which is 'the city of the violet crown.' This is the European residence of Echo."

234-5. A frequently recurring idea in poetry.

237. Two persons (i.e. her brothers) resembling Narcissus (see note on l. 210). Aphordite punished Narcissus for his cruel treatment of Echo by making him fall in love with his own image in a brook. He was finally led to sad disappointment and death, and was subsequently changed into the flower that bears his name.

239. cf. ll. 194-5.

241. *Parley*, conversation, dialongue; from French *parler*, to speak.

242. *translated*, transferred; raised (to Heaven).

242-3. i.e. if Echo is taken to Heaven, she will add to the beauty of heavenly harmonies (by repeating them). Cf. 'the music of the spheres.'

244. *mortal . . . . mould*, a living being created out of earth ; note the alliteration.

245. *enchanting revishment*, charm that suddenly throws you into an ecstasy.

246-8. the effect of the Lady's music on Comus is referred to. "Divine or holy must be the seat of such strains; the strains give evidence of this something holy' in the singer". All these compliments, it is said, were deserved by the Lady Alice Egerton.

247. *These raptures*, these strains of music.

247, *moves . . . . air*, moves (i.e. stirs) the air till it becomes vocal. Notice the proleptic use of 'vocal' here.

249-52. A poetic exaggeration. 'The strains floated even on the wings of Silence herself, and the dark plumage of the bird of Night was smoothed beyond all recognition.' *Silence* must be the last thing to be interested in *any* sound; the Night also appears as a huge dark bird, whose plumage (darkness) is all ruffled. The music charmed even this ominous bird!

raven down, feathers as black as those of a raven.

251. *fall*, cadence; even cadence is derived from L. *cado*= fall Cf. *Twelfth Night* I, 1, 4.

252. Notice how Milton uses a bold metaphor. The night is compared to a mighty bird, which spreads its dark wings over the earth. The Charm of the Lady's music falls on this bird and its outspread wings are smoothed by the strains of that music. Dropping all the metaphor, the lines mean that the entrancing strains of music robbed the night of its awfulness and terror.

253. *Sirens* were supposed to possess the power of leading men to destruction by their music. They tried many persons, and very few could escape them. Among those that escaped them were Odysseus; and disappointed by the escape of Odysseus they are said to have drowned themselves. Milton adds to mythology as usual by connecting Circe and the Sirens. Sirens are spoken of as monsters, for they had the heads of women and bodies of birds.

254. *flowery-kirtled Naiades—*, Naiads with skirts made of flowers. Naiads are water-nymphs (of rivers, lakes etc.) *kirtle* gown or skirt. Cf. Browne, *Brittania's Pastorals* I. "Her breasts all bare, her *kirtle* slipping down' . . .

255. *Culling . . . . herbs*, collecting herbs with magical powers, *baleful*, injurious; destructive.

256. *prisoned*, imprisoned (in the body) ; or imprisoned i.e. captivated by the music.

257. *lap*, enwrap. *Elysium*, ideal happiness, supreme bliss; (in Gk. mythology *Elysium* is heaven—the abode of the blessed after death).

257. *i.e.* while they sang, they would fill the enraptured soul with supreme bliss.

257-59. *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, A rock and a whirpool on either side of the straits of Messina, (between Italy and Sicily). On the Italian rock dwelt monster with the bark of a dog, twelve feet, six necks, etc. On the Sicilian side dwelt Charybdis, who could swallow the sea and fill it again, three times a day. These two monsters would not allow a ship to pass between them.

257. *wept*, in admiration.

258. *barking*, making a loud noise; Scylla also was 'a barking monster.'

259. *fell*, fierce, destructive.

258-60. 'Even Scylla was moved to tears (of joy) and made the noisy waves listen to that music; and the fierce Charybdis would gradually begin to praise it.' Not that Scylla had really a grudge against Circe: for, according to one version of the story, Scylla was a beautiful maiden loved by several gods (Zeus, Poseidon, etc.), and the jealousy of Hera, Amphitrite and Circe changed her into a monster.

259-60. Note the repetition of *s*.

260. *they*, Circe and the Sirens. *lull*—soothe.

261. The 'sweet madness' induced by music put reason to sleep.

262. *home-felt*, felt intensely or keenly.

263. *sober*, sane, with reason unimpaired.

waking bliss, happiness enjoyed with all the faculties awake. Contrasted with '*pleasing slumber*' l. 260.

262-4. Comus contrasts the effect of the Lady's music with that of the music of Circe and the Sirens. The former delights immensely, and can be enjoyed without any harm to reason; the latter also is sweet, but it intoxicates and puts consciousness to sleep. The peculiar superiority of the Lady's song is obviously due to the strictly virtuous life that she is leading.

265. *foreign wonder*, because he has never seen such a woman till that moment.

268. *dwell'st*, should be 'dwells'; but Comus is too agitated to mind grammar; or we can supply 'thou' before 'dwell'st.'

266-9. certainly the rough forest could not produce you; unless you be the goddess of a country shrine, dwelling here with gods like Pan and Sylvanus, and, with the help of your heavenly music, preventing all cold fogs from touching this tall, expanding forest.'

Pan, see note on l. 176; *Sylvan*=Sylvanus, the Roman god of woods.

271. *ill is lost*, lost completely; "a Latin idiom, as Mr. Keightley points out, *male perditur*" (Masson III 267).

273-5. i.e. she sang, not to show her divine gifts, but only because she could not do anything else to regain the company of her lost brothers.

extreme shift, the last resource. 'Extreme' is accented on the first syllable.

275. *courteous*, because Echo *always* answers.

276. *mossy couch*, bed of moss, (as she dwells 'by solw Meander's margent green').

277-90. These lines are strictly classical in form. This peculiar form of dialogue, consisting of speeches of one line each, and mostly questions and answers, was used in Greek and Roman drama; the Greeks called it *stichomythia*. There are examples of *stichomythia* in some Elizabethan plays also, especially those deriving from Sencea's tragedies.

277. *chance*, here mischance, or misfortune.

278. Note the alliteration; *labyrinth*, 'blind maze' (181).

279. *near-ushering*, leading, keep close company.

usher, lead.

281. *falsehood*, treachery.

28E. Cf. lines 185-6.

283. *your fair side*, i.e. your fair self.

284. *purposed*, intended.

285. *forestalling*, anticipating so as to battle them; *prevented*, anticipated (arch.).

286. my misfortune can be very easily guessed.' *hit*, guess.

287. 'Do you think their loss is important, apart from your present need?' i.e. 'what is usual attitude to them?'

Imports, is of importance.

289. i.e. were they grown-up men, or young boys?

290. *'their unrazored lips'* indicating youth.

Hebe, in Gk. mythology, the handmaiden of the gods, pouring out nectar for them; she is regarded as perpetually young, and hence is called the goddess of Youth. She is the daughter of Zeus and Hera.

291. *what time*, when; at the time when. A Latin construction.

292-3. the time of sunset is *suggested*—in keeping with the character of Comus as a 'gentle shepherd' . . . . when the weary ox returns from the field in his loose traces . . . .' *loos* , loosed from the plough; *traces* straps or ropes.

293. Milton is choosing words from pastorals.

Swinked, weary, (from *swink*—A. S. *swincan*—to toil); *hedger*, maker of hedges.

294. *mantling*, spreading or covering like a mantle.

295. *Yon*, yonder; some scenery in the background must have represented a hill.

296. *clusters*, of ripe grapes–(see l. 186).

297-301. Comus pays compliments to the brothers only to please the Lady.

297. *port*, bearing, carriage.

298. *vision*, pronounced as a trisyllable.

299. *creatures of the element*, spirits associated with the different elements like fire, air etc; here, superhuman beings.

301. *play . . . . clouds*, sport in a mass of clouds. *plighted*, folded—some as plaited (L.).

303-4. Comus is eager to oblige the Lady by helping her to find out her brothers. He would be as glad to accompany the Lady in search of her brothers as he would be to go out on a journey to find out a path to heaven.

305. *readiest way*, the way that would most readily lead, i.e. the nearest route.

306. *it*, i.e. the hill (l. 295); *shrubby*, full of shrubs.

309-10. it would be a difficult task even for the best guide, unless his feet were familiar with the tracts in the forest. *pilot*, guide.

312. *dingle*, a hollow between hills; a deep dell.

313. *bosky bourne*, stream with shrubs growing on its banks; (A. S. *burna*)

315. *your stray attendance*, your companions that have gone astray, (i.e. are wandering).

316. *shroud*, take shelter.

317. *low-roosted . . . . lark*, A phrase that has led to a controversy about Milton's observation of Nature. If 'roost' is interpreted in its modern sense, then, as Mr. Keightley observes, "the ideas here belong rather to a hen-house". But later commentators have shown that the word '*roost*' can be used in the simpler sense of '*rest*'; and thus the phrase only means "the lark in her low resting-place." (See Masson, III, 267-8).

318. *pallet*, bed, here, the nest.

317-8. i.e. before the lark stirs in the morning.

320. *loyal*, honest; reliable.

322. *Honest-offered*, honourable offered.

Courtesy, see l. 325. The word is derived from *Court*.

323. *lowly sheds*, humble huts.

324. *smoky rafters*, beams all black with soot.

tapestry halls, halls hung with tapestry—i.e. halls of the rich.

322-6. Milton means that though the word *courtesy* is derived from *court*, real courtesy is found in humble huts rather than in palaces. The sentiment reminds us of Milton's Republican views.

327. *warranted*, protected.

327-9. 'I cannot be in a place less protected (or safe) than this, and so I need not be afraid of leaving it.. The

Lady implies that the place where she is, is extremely dangerous, as it is unprotected.

329. *Eye me*, Look upon me, keep guard on me.

329-30. *square .... strength*, 'Let my trials be in proportion to my strength,' i.e. the trial should not be too severe.

330. *Proportioned*, notice the proleptic use of the adjective.

S. D.—Comus and the Lady do not reappear till l. 659. The two brothers discuss the central idea of the masqne, and its several implications. Sometimes the argument become too abstract, and the cause of the argument (the helpless situation of the sister) is altogether forgotten. Though the speeches are expositions of certain principles, and have little dramatic value, we cannot but admire the rare beauty of expression and the still rarer beauty of their moral elevation.

331. *unmuffle*, take off the veil of darkness.

332. *wont'st* were wont, accustomed to (from *won*, now obsolete except in *wont* and *wonted*).

benison, benediction, blessing.

333. *stoop*, bend, or lean forward.

pale visage, pale appearance.

amber, yellowish and somewhat translucent.

334. *disinherit chaos*, destroy the dense darkness.

disinherit, dispossess, deprive.

Chaos, confusion; complete disorder (personified). In *Par. Last* II Chaos is said to reign with Night as his queen.

335. *in double .... shades*, i.e. the usual night (or absence of light) and the night caused by the shades of trees. As it is already night, shades must mean darkness or confusion, always associated with the trees of the forest.

336. *your influence*, your (i.e. of the moon) power.

dammed up, blocked, checked (by mist).

33'. *gentle taper,* a small candle or lamp.

338. *rush-candle*, made by dipping a rush into wax; hence the simplest or the meanest candle.

wicker-hole, an opening in the wall (of a clay-built hut), covered with wicker-work which admitted light.

340. Note the music of the line; the long line of light —piercing the darkness like a straight bar or rod.

336-42. If the moon is powerless to help them, the brothers are prepared to take the help of the simplest candle from a poor man's hut; hence the invocation 'some gentle taper . . . '. Even this 'will be a guiding-star for them—almost as important as the Greater or the Lesser Bear.

341. *Star of Arcady*, a star in the constellation known as the Great Bear (*Ursa Major*). The nymph Callisto, daughter of the king of Arcadia, was loved by Zeus and become the mother of Arcas. Hera grew jealous and transformed her into a she-bear; Zeus further transformed her into a constellation, known as the Great Bear. Because Callisto belonged to Arcadia (her son Arcas is the ancestor of the Arcadians) Milton refers to *Ursa Major* as the *Star of Arcady*. Greek sailors regarded this constellation as the guiding star.

342. *Tyrian Cynosure*; the constellation known as the Lesser Bear (*Ursa Minor*). Arcas, which hunting, was about to slay his mother (transformed into a bear). So Zeus turned both of them into stars (see above), the son being called the Lesser Bear. *Cynosure*, in Greek, means 'the dog's tail'. The Lesser Bear is named *Cynosure*, because of its resemblance to the dog's tail. The Phoenician sailors used to depend on the Lesser Bear, which contains the pole-star. This is the reason why Milton speaks of *Tyrian Cynosure*, which metaphorically means a centre of attraction' or 'a guiding star'. (Tyre was a town in Phoenicia.)

342-9. The second Brother suggests that in the absence of any light, even some sounds from the neighbouring places would be a great help and comfort to them. The lines describe some sounds that are to be heard in a countryside, and hence in pastoral literature.

344. *folded flocks*, sheep in their folds, *penned* kept in a pen, i.e. enclosure.

wattled cotes, sheds made of hurdles or twigs. cf. Matthew Arnold's use of this phrase in *The Scholar-Gypsy*; Milton has hurdled cotes' in *Par. Lost* IV 186.

345. *pastoral reed*, the shepherd's pipe.

oaten stops, i.e. stop or holes of the reed-pipe. *oaten* from oats. These phrases are frequently repeated in pastoral poetry.

346. *lodge*, the cottage of the keeper of the wood.

347. a beautiful fancy: the cock, surrounded by the hens, is believed to be counting hours. *Feathery dames*, hens.

349. *innumerous*, innumerable.

350. It is rather odd that the Brothers think of their sister only after indulging in a good many poetic fancies. *hapless*, unlucky.

351. *may*=can; *betake her* betake herself, go.

352. *rude burs*, the outer coverings of seeds, that often prick, *thistles*, prickly plants.

353. *bolster*, pillow.

356. *amazement*, bewilderment, utter confusion. Note the omission of 'she be' after 'what if . . . '.

358. 'what if she be a prey to the hunger of wild beasts, or the lust of wilder men . . . .'

heat, lust.

359. *over-exquisite*, too careful, too inquisitive.

350. *to cast the fashion of*, to guess the nature of.

361. *Grant they be so*, admitting that they are real evils.

362. *Forestall . . . , grief*, anticipate his sorrows before they actually come.

364-65. Cf. the proverb 'if hopes are dupes, fears may be liars'.

365. *self delusion*, *fooling oneself.* (*delusion* has *four* syllables: de-lu-si-on.)

366. *so to seek*, wanting in knowledge; deficient.

367. *unprincipled*, here, ignorant of the principle of.

virtue's book, i.e. the book of virtue; Virtues.

368. *bosoms*, feels in its bosom. 'peace' is the reward of 'goodness'.

378. A parenthetical clause; the syntax is suggested by the Latin ablative absolute.

372. *misbecoming plight*, an unbecoming situation.

366-72. The Elder Brother has the fullest faith in his sister's goodness, and so he is reassuring his brother. Mere want of light or of any sound is not enough to perturb a virtuous mind and lead it to unholy thoughts.

372-75. The influence of Spenser is revealed in the early poems of Milton not only in the style but often in the ideas also. The thought in these lines is found at the very beginning of *The Faerie Queene*—

> 'Virtue gives herself light
> Through darkness for to wade' (1. 7. 12.)

375. *Wisdom's self* Wisdom itself (personified); hence, the wisest of the world.

376. *seeks to*, goes, repairs to.

378. *plumes her feathers*, rearranges, trims.

379. *bustle of resort* i.e. in the work-a-day world.

380. *all to-ruffled*, ruffled (i.e. disarranged) too much. *to* is a prefix often found in Middle English (e.g. in Chaucer) and denotes intensity. Milton himself wrote '*all to ruffl'd*' without the hyphen. If we substitute "*all to ruffled*', no difficulty need arise. According to some the reading should be " *all to ruffled*' where *all-to* is an adverb meaning '*completely*'. (see Verily 74-5; Masson III 268-9; Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar*, pars. 280, 435).

375-80. All agree that these lines have an autobiographical interest. They describe the fruitful years (1632-37) Milton spent at Horton in the company of Contemplation. His fondness for a secluded life—the life of a recluse that Wordsworth so much loved—is seen in other poems also. Note how in *Il'Penseroso* (51-54) he is eager to meet 'the cherub Contemplation'. 'Wise men seek solitude for deep meditation; and there reorganise their entire life—often violently disturbed and injured by the bustle of daily activities'.

382. *the centre*, the centre of the earth—here indicating a place far removed from the light of day.

bright day, i.e. light, happiness of the soul.

383. *benighted*, overtaken by night; darkened; hence unhappy, unblessed.

381-5. a deeply religious sentiment, expressed in unforgettable language.

385. et. seq. The Second Brother continues the praise of Contemplation. The repetition obviously emphasises the importance of these ideas.

386. *musing Meditation*, personification,

affects, loves, likes,

387. *pensive secrecy*, i.e privacy leading to thoughtfulness.

388. cf. Gray's 'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife'.

389. A senate house (whether Roman or English) would always be well guarded, and hence *safe*.

391. *beads*, used for counting prayers etc. cf. the phrase 'to tell one's beads'.

maple, made from the wood of the maple tree; 'a wooden dish' indicates the simple life of a hermit.

393-95. *like . . . . eye*, beautiful maidens must be as diligently guarded as the tree of golden; for, 'Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold' (*As You Like It* I, 1,

3, 106). *fair Hesperian tree*, a tree, according to classical mythology, guarded by the nymphs *Hesperides*, the 'Daughters of Evening'. The golden apples were first given by Ge (Earth) to Hera at her marriage with Zeus. *dragon-watch* ref. to the fact that the dragon Ladon helped the maidens in their watch. The Hesperides dwelt 'far away in the west'—near the Atlas mountains. Obtaining possession of the apples was one of the 'twelve labours of Hercules'—(see Smith's Classical Dictionary).

393-394. *Had need the guard . . . . unenchanted eye* *i.e.* would need the dragons to guard her with eyes that cannot fall under the spell of any enchanter or sorcerer.

396. used metaphorically with Beauty, 'to defend the virtue (chastity) of beautiful maidens . . .'.

396. *bold Incontinence*, lustful adventurers. *Incontinence* (personified)=persons lacking in self-restraint in sexual matters.

397. *unsumed*, hidden underground, and hence *unsunned*.

398. *by . . . . den*, near the cave of a robber. An *outlaw* is really one deprived of the protection of the law.

401. Note how terse the style becomes with the help of personifications of abstractions.

400. *Danger*—a dangerous man ; adventurer.

wink on let go unheeded ; disregard ; *Opportunity*, chance.

398-,03. The lines may be rendered thus—'to hope that a reckless, lewd man will not seize his precious opportunity of violating; viz. a solitary, beautiful virgin in a dark forest . . . ..is as good as hoping that the treasures spread out before a robber's cave will be left untouched . . . .'

403. *it recks me not*, I do not care for.

404. *dog*, pursue, follow.

405. *ill-greeting*, harmful, sinful.

405. *attempt* i.e. molest or violate.

406. *unowned*, without a friend ; lonely.

403-6. 'I am not worried on account of night or dakness ; but on account of the dreadful events that always follow both . . . .'

407. *infer*, here 'argue.'

409. *equal poise . . . . fear*, when the two are equally balanced.

410. *the event*, the issue.

arbitrate, settle, judge.

411-13. The Elder Brother is more 'hopeful'—i.e. between hope and fear, he clings to hope, if the two balance each other.

412. *squint suspicion*, suspicion by its very nature cannot look straight, but in an awry manner.

414.5. *she has . . . . not*. This sentence accounts for the optimistic view that the Elder Brother takes. He believes in the power of a virtuous soul.

417-474. This long speech of the Elder Brother deserves a very careful analysis, as it contains the longest exposition of the central idea of *Comus*. The speech sounds like a long commentary on a doctrine that Milton manifestly loves. According to Prof. Masson (III 260) the speech is "an exposition of a cardinal idea of Milton's philosophy."

418. *if*, even if.

419. *chastity* : this is the 'hidden strength' that 'may be termed her own'.

420-24. There is no stronger armour than chastity for a virgin cf. Spenser's description of Belphoebe, *Faerie Queene* II, 3, 29-31.

421. *quivered nymph*, a maiden armed with a quiver—the case in which arrows are kept.

422. *trace*, pass through.

unharboured, offering no shelter, (the proper sense of '*harbour*' ; Icelandic).

425. *bandite*, an out-law (Italian from *ban*.)

moantaineer ; a wild savage person ; the word had, like 'bandit', a bad sense. (Editors quote from *Cymbeline* IV, 2, 120.)

428-31. An exaggeration for the sake of emphasis.

427. *very desolation*, utter loneliness.

429. Note how the sound of the line suggests ruggedness.

428. *grots*, grottos, caves ; *Cavern*=a large cave.

shagged, made shaggy ; *horrid*, shaggy. The adjectives shaggy and horrid emphasize the idea of horror and gloom. Latin *Horrere*, to bristle.

429. *unblenched*, unflinching ; unfaltering. (*blench*, causal from *blink*.)

430. *be it not*, if it be not . . . . *presumption*, pride, arrogance.

431. *walks*, a term always used of ghosts.

432. The line describes the traditional origin of these ghosts. (Cf. Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*). Milton himself in *P. L.* IX, describes how spirits of fire lead men astray. Cf. ' . . . . Misleads amazed night-wanderer from his way, To bogs and mires, and through pond or pool'.

fire, refers to the fire seen on marshy ground, usually called the Will-O'-the-wisp—known also as *ignis fatuus* (L. : foolish fire).

fen, low, marshy tract of land.

433. *blue meagre hag*, ugly woman, lean and old ; an old witch. *blue* refers to the dark wrinkles under the eyes, a sign of weakness. cf. Rosalind's description of a lover in *As You Like It* III, 2, 359-367, where '*a blue eye*' indicates blueness or blackness round the eye, due to weeping.

stubborn unlaid ghost, a ghost that refuses to be laid i.e. calmed or exorcised; refers to the superstition that ghosts exorcised in Latin would cease to wander, and thus leave men free. For *unlaid* cf. *Cymbeline* IV, 2, 278.

435. ghosts and other beings were supposed to leave their own world, and begin wandering on the earth at curfew time; Shakespeare often refers to this superstition. Thus the foul friend Flibbertigibbet 'begins at curfew and walks till the first cock' (*King Lear*, III, 4, 121).

434. *curfew time*, usually eight or nine o'clock at night;

curfew (old French *covre-feu*) denotes time for putting out lights. Cray's use of the word in his *Elegy* explains the meaning.

435. *goblin*, a mischievous demon.

swart, dark in complexion. *faery* i.e. a fiend.

435. *of the mine*, an old superstition that fiends dwelt in mines – i.e. underground.

432-6. This passage again sums up some of the superstitions of the time. Milton says at great length that no evil spirit can ever do harm to a pure virgin. Perhaps Milton's own lines in *Il' Penseroso* would have done as well—

> . . . . Demons that are found
> In fire, air, flood or underground.

438-40. Obviously, Milton himself, and not the Elder Brother, is speaking. In support of his own views on chastity, he cites the Greek writers.

438. *Antiquity*, i.e. the views or wisdom of the ancient world; Greek and Roman mythology.

schools of Greece, i.e. of Greek philosophers, like Socrates. In *Par. Regained* l. 250 et. seq. Milton praises many such 'schools', of philosophy.

> 'To sage Philosophy next lend thine ear,
>
> Heaven descended to the low-rooft house of Socrates,'

440. *huntress Dian*, Diana, 'queen and huntress, chaste and fair,' a Roman goddess identified with the Greek Artemis. She was the sister of Apollo, and, like him, unmarried. She is the goddess of chastity, as she was never conquered by love.

441. *silver-shafted*, with white arrows, probably because the 'huntress' is also identified with the goddess of the Moon. (Note that a good many legends are current about this goddess).

442. *brinded*, streaked, spotted ; brindled.

433. *mountain-pard*, a panther ; a wild beast of the mountains.

set at nought, disregarded ; flouted.

444. *bolt of Cupid*, Cupid's arrows. Cupid was the boygod of love in Roman mythology ; (Gr. Erose). He is represented as an archer, with golden and leaden arrows.

446. *snaky . . . , shield*, Medusa, though a Gorgon, had beautiful hair at first ; but her hair was changed into serpents (hence *snaky-headed*) by Athena (i.e. Minerva). The face became so fearful that everyone who looked at it was changed into stone. Perseus killed her, and Athena kept the petrifying head in her shield.

447. *Minerva*, all exploits of the Gk. Athena are also attributed to the Roman Mineva. She was a virgin-goddess—the patroness of every art and craft, thus conferring on women skill in sewing and spinning and on men skill in war tactics. She is often represented as armed with a helmet, shield, etc.

448. *wherewith . . . . stone*, see note on l. 447. The strange power that Medusa's head possessed is explained by Milton as due to Minerva's chastity—which means that the head continued its work even in Minerva's breastplate.

congealed, lit. solidified by freezing.

449. *rigid*, stern ; stiff.

450. *dashed*, shattered, shamed, discomfeited.

brute violence i.e., violence like that of brutes.

451. *blank awe*, sheer awe ; *i.e.* absolute reverence.

447-52. These lines give us Milton's fresh interpretation of a classical legend. Mr. Verity believes that here "Milton points the moral" (p. 79). Milton, it should be noted, refers not to the 'schools of Greece', but to popular mythology of Greece and Rome ; he reads sublime truths into these myths or popular superstitions ; and of these classical myths, he suggests a new interpretation.

453-74. The praise of Chastity continues. In these lines, according to Masson, Mr. Milton "passes into a strain of Platonic philosophy tinged with Christianity" (III, 270). Milton, by his queer amalgamation of classical myths and Christian sentiments; suggests the inviolate power of Chastity—independent of any creed or clan.

454. *a thousand . . . . lackey her*, thousands.of God's servants wait upon a genuinely (i.e. in mind and body) chaste person.

lackey, attend, wait upon. In modern English the noun '*lackey*' is used also for an obsequious person, and hence the verb has a bad tinge.

liveried, wearing the distinctive dress of servants—here, the robes of angels.

456. i.e. in sleep, and also while waking ; *vision* indicates a sudden revelation that comes only to few. The angels illuminate a virtuous soul by bringing divine messages.

457. cf. "Of things invisible to mortal sight", *Par. Lost* III. 55.

458. *oft*, frequent. *converse* i.e. communication.

459. *beam* i.e. of light or glory.

460. *temple of the mind*, the body ; a Biblical phrase.

451-62. 'frequent communication with divine beings illuminates not only the soul, but also the body ; till,

at length, the body approaches the perfection of the soul, and both thus become immortal (divine)'. That man should strive for divine perfection is but natural; all religions positively teach that the aim of every man's life should be to attain the divine state. Milton speaks of his doctrine of perfectibility in greater detail in *Par. Lost* V, 469 et seq. cf. ll. 497-500.

> Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
> Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
> Ethereal, as we, or may at choice
> Here or in Heavenly Paradise dwell.

463-4. i.e. sensual or sinful thoughts or deeds.

465. *inward parts*, the soul.

466. *clotted*, thickened (like coagulated blood): metaphorically as here, *debased*.

467. *imbodies, and imbrutes*, (the soul) becomes a body, the body of a brute; words describing the downward process, possibly of Milton's own coining (see Masson III, 271).

463-9. Milton points out that corruption starts with the body and passes on the soul; once the two are debased, man is indistinguishable from beasts.

470-74. Warton detected Milton's use of a passage in Plato's *Phaedo* in these lines. In the dialogue between Socrates and Cebes, Socrates speaks of the 'polluted' soul 'held fast by the corporeal!' Such a soul is terribly afraid of the invisible world, and hence hovers about the dead body in several forms, Plato (and following him, Milton,) affirms that the corrupt soul finds it extremely difficult to sever its close connection with the corrupt body; hence 'the *ghostly apparitions of souls*, which have not departed pure.' (See the translation of Plato's Dialogues by Jowett; or the pertinent passages quoted by several editors).

469. *gloomy shadow, damp*, the dissatisfied, depressed souls.

470. *charnel vaults*, places containing corpses or bones.

sepulchres, tombs.

471. cf. Plato's 'prowling about tombs and sepulchres' (Jowett).

472. *as loth* . . . , as if unwilling . . . . ; *it*, used for 'gloomy shadows.'

472. *carnal sensuality*, gratification of fleshly (carnal) appetites.

474. *degenerable*, i.e. (state) in which the proper qualities are all lost, (*gemus*, race, L.)

476-80. Mr. Masson thinks that this passage is a 'special compliment to Plato'. Lines in *Par. Regained* (250 et seq.) praising Philosophy, prove that Milton had respect for all 'schools of Philosophy'. (cf. note on l. 439). He pays the highest compliment to Socrates, and mentions the Peripatetics, the Epicureans, and Stoics. In this passage, however, *Philosophy* indicates the wise and highly moral teaching of great men.

477. *Crabbed*, hard to understand.

478. *Apollo*, the god of music, especially the lyre.

nectared, sweet as nectar.

479-80. i.e. satiety does not result even from a constant reading of Philosophy—unlike sweets.

crude, undigested. Latin. *crudus*. Cf. *Lycidas* 3.

482. *night-foundered*, benighted.

486. *draw*, 'draw your sword'.

487. *defence*, i.e. self-defence is always justified.

S. D. The Attendant Spirit presents itself on account of the 'hallo'.

490. *iron stakes*, i.e. the swords that were *drawn*.

493. *Thyrsis*, often the name of a shepherd in pastoral poetry, and dating from Theocritus and Virgil. (cf. Matthew Arnold's choice of the name.)

493-500. Again, a description of pastoral life.

494-6. A compliment to the musical gifts of Mr. Lawes, who played the part of Thyrsis (Attendant Spirit). Even brooks and flowers were enchanted by his music.

494. *huddling*, forming into a mass, forgetting to flow.

494. *madrigal*, a short pastoral song, often dealing with love.

495. *musk-rose*, a kind of rose, smelling like musk.

496. *swain*, a common word in pastorals; a young rustic.

497. *dom*, mother (of beasts).

498. *straggling wether*, stray ram.

pent, i.e. penned.

499. *sequestered*, secluded; out of the way; quiet.

495-512. Note the use of rhyme. Milton has introduced heroic couplets in the midst of blank verse. Masson suggests that Milton "wanted to prolong the feeling of Pastoralism" by imitating the usual cadence of Pastoral Poetry. Rhyme was often used for variation in blank verse, and the heroic couplet was used freely in pastorals like *The Shepherd's Calender*.

500. *his next joy*, i.e. next to the 'heir'; hence the Second Brother. Thyrsis addresses both the brothers.

503. *pilfering wolf*, wolf stealing a petty lamb.

fleecy wealth, wealth in the form of sheep.

505. *care it broughts*, anxiety which my mission has brought.

506. The Attendant Spirit really knows everything.

507. *How chance . . . .*, by what chance is she . . . .

508. *sadly*, seriously (arch.) truly.

511. *prithee*, I pray thee; (arch.).

shew, Milton rimes this word with *true*;—the pronunciation suggested by the rime has disappeared.

512. *fabulous*, found in old fables; legendary.

514. *sage poets*, great poets of the world, especially Homer and Virgil, and poets deriving inspiration from them.

taught . . . . Muse, inspired by God; repeated in *Par. Lost* III, 19.

515. *storied*, described in stories; narrated.

516. *Chimera*, in Greek mythology, a monster with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a dragon. According to Virgil, she was armed with flame'. (See O. C. C. L.; and Smith's *Class. Dict.*)

enchanted isles, i.e. of enchantresses like Circe and Calypso, described in the *Odyssey*. (Verity believes that the reference is to Spenser's account of the 'Wandering Islands' in *The Faerie Queene* II.)

517. *rifted rocks*, rocks with *rifts* or chasms.

518. *unbelief is blind*, Unbelieving persons refuse to believe this fact or truth; a beautiful generalisation.

512-18. Thyrsis prepares us for the description of Comus that follows. Milton reminds us of ancient poets singing of supernatural things, to make his own description appear more probable.

519. *navel*, centre.

520. *immured*, shut up, confined, surrounded by; (L. murus=wall).

Cypress, cypress twigs are a symbol of mourning: hence appropriate for the practice of 'black magic'.

525. *murmurs*, incantations. Note the alliteration.

526. *visage . . . . transforms*, i.e. transforms or changes the face completely.

528-529. *unmoulding . . . . face*, destroying the stamp of reason imprinted on the human face. The idea is expressed in language used in describing the process of coining.

528. *unmoulding*, destroying the mould of.

reason, the faculty that distinguishes man from brutes: hence, when *reason* is destroyed, he is changed into a beast. *mintage*, here equivalent to stamp'.

529. *charactered*, stamped, or fixed.

530. *croft*, the modern meaning is 'arable and land close to a house'. *Hilly crofts* implies pastures in hilly tracts.

531. *brow*, overhang; *bottom glade*, the low valley; *bottom* is used sometimes in the sense of 'a *valley*'; the meaning then would be 'a glade in the valley'.

532. *monstrous rout*, revellers with shapes of monsters.

534. *Hecate*, see note on l. 135.

534. *stabled*, imprisoned in stables, or 'that have found their way into a sheep-fold' (see Verity),

535. *inmost bowers*, i.e. innermost or impenetrable rooms.

536. *guilful spells*, deceitful charms, enticements,

537. *inveigle*, seduce, entice; *invite*, attract.

unwary, not on its guard, unknowing,

538. *unweeting*, unknowing (unwitting).

539. *by then . . . . when*, by the time that.

chewing, i. e. chewing the cud.

541. *knot-grass*, grass with intricate stems and pink flowers, *dew-besprent*, sprinkled with dew (besprinkled) ; 'besprent' is used only in poetry.

543, *canopied*, covered.

544. *flaunting*, displaying itself proudly; waving in a showy manner.

honeysuckle, a shrub with fragrant yellow flowers; woodbine.

545. *Wrapt . . . . melancholy*, i. e. in a pensive, not sad, A mood; immersed in serious thought. (Gk. *melas* : black ; *khole* : *bile*).

546. *meditate*, practise, pursue,

rural minstrelsy, pastoral poetry or music.

547. *Till fancy . . . . fill*, till he was satisfied.

ere a close, "before he had finished his song" (Masson). *a close*, a cadence in his song.

548. *wonted*, usual.

549. *dissonance*, discord ; jarring sound.

551. *unusual stop*, due to 'the different pace of some chaste footing' (l. 145).

552. *respite*, interval of rest ; temporary relief.

drowsy-flighted, this apparently harmless phrase has given rise to a good deal of controversy. Milton's editions print "*drowsie frighted*"—two distinct words ; Lawes's edition has the same reading. The Cambridge MS. alone gives the reading adopted here, though without the hyphen. '*drowsy-flighted*' is considered "a very poetical epithet" by Mr. Masson. It means drowsily flying, flying or running while half asleep ; *drowsy frighted* would mean drowsy *and* frighted i.e. frightened by the noise. Mr. Verity thinks that the germ of Milton's phrase lies in a passage in 2 *Henry* VI. iv, 1 :

"And now loud-howling wolves arouse the jades
That drag the tragic melancholy night ;
Who with their *drowsy, slow and flagging wings*
Clip dead men's graves."

551-3. i.e. the sudden silence gave a temporary rest to the drowsily running horses of Sleep's chariot. Even the horses heaved a sigh of relief.

553. *litter*, carriage, chariot, *close-curtained*, hidden behind curtains like an Eastern lady in a palanquin. Shakespeare uses "curtain'd sleep" in *Macbeth* II, I. 51.

555. *Rose . . . . perfumes*, the song (sung by the Lady) came as imperceptibly as the smell of rich scents. *steam*=gush.

555-557. Notice the alliteration in 'r', 's'.

557-8. *took ere she was ware*, i.e. was taken by surprise: captivated; *ware*, aware.

558. *deny her nature . . . . more*, give up not only her nature but her very being or existence.

559. *still to be so displaced*, if she could always be superseded or driven away in that manner. Silence, surprised and charmed by the music, was untrue to her nature and longed to hear that music again.

still, always *displaced*, i.e. by sound, by music.

556-59. *that even Silence . . . . displaced*, cf. l. 250.

555-60. obviously a compliment to the Lady.

559. *all ear*, all attentive.

560-1. *took in strains . . . . Death*, *i.e.* listened to strains that could revive a corpse.

create a soul, bring back to life by giving . . . .

561. *the ribs of Death*, because the soul dwells in the breast. According to some, a reference to a picture in an old book '*A Book of Emblems*', representing the soul as imprisoned within the ribs.

564. *harrowed*, distressed.

headlong haste, rash haste, precipitate haste.

570. *damned wizard*, i.e. Comus. *wizard*, conjurer.

576. *durst*, past tense of '*dare*'.

580. *joined with . . . . knot*, i.e. formed a triple alliance (Night, Shades, Hell).

582-3. *Is this . . . . me*, this question is a convenient excuse for the Elder Brother's speech that follows.

584-5. *not a . . . . for me*, 'I am not prepared to retract even a single word . . . . *period*, a periodic sentence; here a sentence or a word.

588-89. The deep conviction of a virtuous soul. In these two memorable lines, the poet reaffirms his noble faith—that virtue is the strongest armour in this world.

590. i.e. a virtuous man may temporarily be made to suffer, but he is never completely enslaved. Virtue helps him to regain his former freedom.

590-1. Even the most harmful devices of evil-doers (mischief) will prove in the end to be greatly beneficial to the virtuous, and thus add to their glory.

592. i.e. evil will destroy itself.

593. evil will be separated from good, like chaff from grain.

594. *scum*, impure matter that rises to the surface of a liquid.

596. *self-fed and self-consumed*, i.e. evil feeds on itself and brings about its own destruction.

596. *if this fail*, if what I say proves untrue or false, then . . .

597. *the pillared firmament*, the sky, with the support of a pillar. The idea is an old one and editors quote from *Job* XXVI, ii :

"the pillars of heaven tremble . . . ."

598. *stubble*, literally, stumps of grain left in the field after reaping ; here the word indicates 'something utterly worthless'.

599-600. i.e. the sword will never be used against the wishes of God.

601. *girt*, surrounded.

602. *griesly*, horrible, causing terror (grisly).

legions, 'the vast army' ; a trisyllable here.

603. *sooty*, dark, black like soot.

Acheron, In Gk. mythology, one of the rivers of the lower world (Hades), like Styx ; hence, both Styx and Acheron are used to signify hell in general ; 'Hades'.

[Milton refers to Acheron in the famous passage in *Par. Lost* (II, 575-84) where he describes 'the four infernal rivers'—viz. Styx, Acheron, Phlegethon, and Cocytus.

The Latin poets added a fifth (also mentioned in this passage by Milton)—Lethe.]

604. *Harpies*, in Gk. mythology, usually represented as disgusting monsters. with bodies of birds and heads of women, and lóng claws that helped them in '*robbing*' (Gk. *Harpyiae*=Robbers). In Homer they are personified storm winds. They carried off the daughter of King Pandareus, teased blind Phineus, carried off the food that Aeneas and his friends were eating in the islands of Strophades, etc.

Hydras (water serpents); Hydra was a monster with nine heads; it ravaged the country of Lernae. Killing this monster was one of the twelve labours of Hercules (see Smith's *Classical Dictionary*).

606. *purchase*, booty, spoil. (*Fr.* origin)

608. The Elder Brother is confident that he will overpower Comus, in spite of the help that the latter might receive from the underworld, etc.

609. *yet*, all the same, i.e. though it will be of no avail; *emprise*, enterprise.

610. *stead*, help, service; the word originally meant 'place,' whence we get 'instead of'.

612. *quell*, subdue, defeat.

613-4. Note the supernatural strength of Comus,

wand, the conjuror's staff.

unthread thy joints, break thy joints to pieces.

614. *crumble*, cause to shrink, decay, etc. cf. *Tempest*, I, 2, 469-73.

616. *relation*, report, account.

shifts, stratagems, expedients; here, consideration of shifts, etc.

617. *from surprisal*, from being suddenly overtaken.

618-28. In these lines many have suspected a reference to Milton's close friend, Charles Diodati, practising as a

physician when *Comus* was written (see *Masson* III, 272). Diodati, a half-Italian, was Milton's closest friend at St. Paul's School. Milton wrote a pastoral elegy in Latin on the death of Diodati (*Epitaphium Damonis*). He addressed to his friend some of his poems also, the best known being the fourth sonnet, which deals with Milton's first love affair (written in Italian). Diodati was Milton's confident in this respect, and the First Elegy (Latin: *Elegia Prima*) addressed to him, discusses, like the sonnet, Milton's views about women and love (see translations in the Oxford Edition of Milton's Poems).

618. *shepherd lad*, Charles Diodati.

619. *of small . . . . to*, insignificant in appearance.

to see to, to look at, to behold. This expression is now obsolete.

619-20. *yet . . . . herb*, The *Epitaphium Damonis* refers to Diodati's knowledge of botany. It should be noted that in the Latin Elegy, Diodati is called Damon, and *Milton himself* is *Thyrsis*.

620. *Virtuous*, possessing medicinal properties.

621. *verdant*, green, fresh.

624. *even to ecstasy*, i.e. till he was transported into an ecstasy.

625. *requital*, as a return, in return.

scrip, bag.

626. *simples* (arch.) herbs used in medicine. cf. *Romeo and Juliet* V, 1. 40; *As You Like It* IV. Jacques uses it in its primary sense (i.e. ingredient) when he describes his melancholy as 'compounded of many simples'.

628. *unsightly*, ugly, not attractive.

629. *culled me out*, selected, picked out for me.

632. *but not . . . . soil*, but the herb cannot bear flowers in this world . . . .

633. *like esteemed*, esteemed in the same way i.e. unknown and unesteemed.

634. *clouted shoon*, patched or mended shoes. *clouted*, from Anglo-Saxon, *clut*, 'a patch', and Middle English *clouten*. The word is used in this sense in many places; cf. Shakespeare's use in *2 Henry VI*, iv, 2, 195; and *Cymbeline* iv. 2, 214.

shoon, an Old English plural like hosen, eyen, foen, etc.

635-6. *than that Moly*, than the well-known herb Moly. Moly was the magical herb which Ulysses (Odysseus) received from Hermes as a protection against the magic of Circe; his companions also could be restored to their own forms (they had been transformed into swine) with the help of this herb.

636. *Hermes*, the god of luck and wealth, patron of merchants and thieves: identified by the Romans with Mercury.

wise Ulysses, Homer's usual description of Ulysses.

637. *He called it Haemony*, i.e. the shepherd lad called his herb Hæmony. The name is explained as a reference to *Haemonia*, an old name for Thessaly, "the land of magic for the Greeks." (See *Masson* III.)

638. *sovran*, sovereign, most efficacious.

639. *mildew blast*, i.e. blight or harm caused by mildew. Mildew (or honeydew) is really the growth of fungi on plants. Here mildew blast is supposed to be due to evil spirits; cf. *King Lear* III, 4, 123, and *Hamlet* III, 4, 64.

640. *Furies*, evil spirits; in Greek mythology, snake-haired avenging goddesses.

apparition, ghost-like appearance.

641. *I pursed it up*, i.e. I kept it in my purse.

641-2. Thyrsis cared little for the herb given by his friend till he was compelled by the present danger to remember it . . . .

643. *it*, refers to the account of the herb given by his friend.

645. *entered . . . . spells*, i.e. went near the most dangerous net spread by his magic.

lime twigs, i.e. twigs smeared with *birdlime*, a sticky substance used for catching birds ; metaphorically used for dangerous snares.

648. *necromancer*, magician ; wizard. *Necromancy* really means "divination with the help of dealings, or communication with the dead". [De Quincey has an excellent note on words like necromancy, rhabdomancy etc. in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*.]

649. *hardihood*, courage, bravery.

650. *brandished blade* sword that is being flourished, or waved. Some editors find in this advice of Thyrsis an echo of Hermes advice to Ulysses (*Odyssey X*).

650. *break his glass*, Guyon, in *The Faerie Queene* breaks the glass offered by Acrasia, the sorceress. It is too much indeed to suggest that Milton must have remembered Spenser's passage when he wrote his own ; though line 652 has its counterpart in Spenser in 'And with the liquor stained all the land.'

651. *luscious*, very sweet and pleasant to the taste ; cloyingly sweet.

652. *seize his wand*, The Brothers fails to seize the wand, with very dangerous consequences—1. 812 et seq.

653. *menace*, threaten.

654. *sons of Vulcan*, Vulcan was the Roman fire-god, god of the smithy ; being the god of furnaces, his sons (or pupils) will vomit smoke. Virgil mentions a son, Cacus, who vomited smoke when Hercules attacked him. Hercules killed Cacus in the end (*Aeneid* VIII).

655. *shrink*, i.e. in fear, hesitate, flinch.

658. *some good angel*, i.e. a guardian angel.

S.D. This change of scene comes as a great relief : for, the dark forest has been the scene of action (or rather *dialogue*) for a long time. It gives scope for a display of wealth and luxury, and 'the stately palace' must have been

very gorgeously decorated at Ludlow Castle. The addition of 'soft music' (absent in the *Cambridge MS.*) is supposed to be due to Lawes.

enchanted chair, i.e. from which one cannot get away at will; line 917 explains how the chair was 'enchanted.'

659-813. These lines are the most effective from the dramatic point of view inasmuch as an exciting conflict is depicted here. Both Comus and the Lady have been elaborately described, and the relative merits of Vice and Virtue settled. But the real interest begins when the two are brought face to face, and allowed to speak for themselves. According to Dr. Johnson: "The dispute between the Lady and Comus is the most animated and affecting scene of the drama, and wants nothing but a brisker reciprocation of objections and replies to invite attention, and detain it."

659. *alabaster*, carbonate or sulphate of lime. White alabaster was used for 'statues' or monuments, and Shakespeare often mentions it. Cf. Othello's description of Desdemona as "smooth as monumental alabaster" (V. 2,5).

your nerves . . . . alabaster, your sinews will be turned into a statue (of alabaster).

660-1. *as Daphne . . . . Apollo*, Daphne was an extremely beautiful maiden with whom Apollo fell in love. When pursued by him, she prayed for aid, and was transformed into a laurel-tree. Hence the laurel is the favourite tree of Apollo. *root-bound*, because she was changed into a tree. Comus means that with the help of his wand he can fix the lady into the chair for ever as Daphne was fixed into the ground.

663. *corporal rind*, rind is the outer covering of a fruit; hence bodily covering (of the soul).

664. *immanacled*, chained, fettered.

while . . . good, i.e. so long as God sees everything.

666-89. Comus tries to tempt the Lady by mentioning several things that will have a sensuous appeal—a somewhat puerile attempt. Mr. Verity finds in this scene a

resemblance to a scene in "a religious play *Adamo* (1613) by the Italian poet Andreini."

668-69. *that fancy . . . . lively*, i.e. all the pleasures that youth, newly acquainted with Love, will desire. *fancy*, youthful love, as in Shakespeare.

669-670. *and returns . . . . season*, perhaps a reference to the vigorous and healthy circulation of blood in youth. The blood is as fresh as the April buds in spring. (*primrose* is a flower of the spring.) Cf. Perdita's compliment to Florizel (*Winter's Tale* IV, 4, 147-8):

> . . . . but that your youth,
>
> And the true blood which peeps fairly through't.

671. *cordial julep*, a sweet drink that will stimulate the heart (cordial from *cor*, heart, L.; *julep*, Persian *gul*-rose, *ab*-water; hence, originally rose-water, later any sweet drink).

672. *his*, its. (Note that *his* was the usual *neuter* possessive form in Middle English, and it continued to the days of Milton. The form *its* gradually came into vogue only in the 17th century. Shakespeare never uses 'its', and Milton only three times).

672. *crystal bounds*, i.e. of the crystal glass.

673. *balm*, or balsam, a tree giving a fragrant soothing substance.

674-75. *Not that Nepenthes . . . . Helena*: *The Odyssey* (IV, 219-229) narrates how, while Telemachus was being entertained, Helen "cast a drug into the wine whereof they drank, a drug to lull all pain and anger, and bring forgetfulness of every sorrow." (See Butcher and Lang's Translation). It is further stated that Helen got medicines of such virtues from Polydamna, wife of Thone. Polydamna belonged to Egypt, hence Milton's phrase 'in Egypt.' *Nepenthes* (Gk. '*free from grief*'), the drug given by the wife of Thone to Helen. Spenser describes it in the *Faerie Queene* IV, 3 :—

Nepenthe is a drink of sovereign grace
Devised by the gods for to assuage
Heart's grief . . .

Helena, Helen of Troy, who was the cause of the Trojan War. She was the daughter of Zeus and Leda, hence 'Jove-born'.

678-79. *Why should . . . . limbs*, an echo of Shakespeare's "Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel," Sonnet I.

invert the covenants, violate the conditions under which Nature gave you this beautiful body as a trust.

681. *covenants*, terms of agreement, contract.

683. *other*, different.

684. *unexempt condition*, condition from which none can be exempted.

685. i.e., frail humanity subsists on this 'condition.'

686. *Refreshment after toil*, etc. this is the 'unexempt condition.'

687. *That have been* . . . . i.e. you that have . . . .

679-88. Milton is using legal phraseology. Nature has *lent* beauty, and her '*unexempt condition*' is 'refreshment must follow toil.' The Lady is breaking her contract (*invert . . . trust*) inasmuch as she is tiring herself out without rest.

688. *timely*, early; just at the proper time; without delay.

693. *aspects*, faces, appearances.

695. *Hence*, i.e. go hence . . . .

brewed enchantments, enchantments or spells prepared by the process of brewing; ref. to the liquid in the cup.

696. *credulous innocence*, innocence that is ready to believe, unsuspecting . . .

697. *vizored*, i.e. masked, (*vizor*: mask). He put on the mask or disguise of a harmless villager.

base forgery, a mean deceitful device ; here 'tempting.'

699. *lickerish*, dainty, sweet, attractive.

700. *Juno*, in Roman mythology the wife of Jupiter : hence the Greek Hera.

703. *good*, here, given by a good or virtuous person. Milton exalts continence and purity of life.

706. *budge . . . . stoic fur*, budge was the name of a kind of fur ; *budge doctors* would therefore mean 'learned men wearing gowns of budge.' Masson suggests (III, 273) that the other meaning of *budge* also (viz. *budge* adj. stout, portly) may have been in Milton's mind. The line would mean " . . . those stout stoic philosophers, wearing budge-gowns . . . " According to Mr. Verity, Milton uses '*budge*' to 'suggest a learned professor with a budge-trimmed hood.' But the very fact that Milton uses both *budge* and *fur* in the same line should suggest that *budge* may be meant to have the sense of adjective and not the noun ; but the difficulty becomes greater as the use of the adjective seems to be unknown in the days of Milton. (See O.E.D.) *Stoic*: the Stoic school of philosophy was led by Zeno. Stoicism taught many useful principles like equality, justice, brotherhood of man etc. It also meant a constant worship of Virtue, and concentration on inner life.

707. *fetch . . . . tub*, i.e. have learned their doctrines from a cynical philosopher like Diogenes. *Cynic tub* refers to the tub in which Diogenes, the great cynic, resided. *Cynicism* was started by Antisthenes. The later Cynics began to disregard social conventions and claimed individual freedom. Diogenes, the greatest Cynic, preached austerity and set an example himself. He subjected himself to great physical hardships and finally began to dwell in a *tub*. It is believed that the name '*Cynics*' was due to their unconventional or 'dog-like' behaviour : (the word 'cynic' is derived from a Gk. word meaning 'dog.').

708. *Abstinence*, personified ; abstaining from all pleasure, and living an extremely austere life.

709. *bounties*, gifts.

710. *unwithdrawing*, withholding nothing, i.e. liberal.

712. *spawn*, lit. eggs of fish, frogs etc. : sea creatures.

713. *sate*, satisfy.

curious taste, i.e. persons with a fastidious or critical taste.

715. *green shops*, green workshop i.e. trees.

718. *hitched*, kept as in a hutch (lit. a bin) ; treasured up.

720. *pet*, i.e. a fit.

721. *frieze*, rough woollen cloth.

720-24. . . . if all persons were to take a vow of simplicity, what *is* the use of infinite riches created for man by God? Satan quoting the scriptures for his dark purposes. The argument is a good defence of Epicureanism.

725. *penurious niggard*, i.e. a stingy miser. *penurious*, stingy, or poor.

726. *Natures bastards*, those who have no right to nature's rich gifts, as the bastard or illegitimate sons have no right to their father's property.

727. *who*, i.e. Nature, *surcharged*, overladen.

728. *waste fertility*, fruitfulness that is merely wasted ; useless fertility.

729. Comus draws a picture of the world as it would be if all took to 'temperance.'

729. *cumbered*, i.e. obstructed in its movement, by being 'surcharged'; the lines that follow indicate that '*cumbered*' may be interpreted as '*overcrowded*' (by superfluous things).

and the winged . . . . plumes, there would be too many birds in the sky, and it would be darkened by their wings. *winged air* i.e. air full of wings (of birds). *plumes*, feathers.

730. There would be more cattle than men.

over-multitude, outnumber.

731. *o'er frought, i.e.,* 'with spawn innumerable' (713) overfull (on account of fish etc.).

unsought diamonds, diamonds not desired by men.

732. *emblaze*, set ablaze, illumine.

forehead, metaphorically, the surface of the sea.

733. *bestud with stars*, fill with stars.

they below, i.e., those (creatures, monsters) that inhabit the sea.

734. *inured*, used to, accustomed to.

731-37. a 'logical' exaggeration; Comus is following the *reductio ad absurdum* method. He proves how undesirable temperance is, by describing the state of the world after temperance has ruled for a while. Milton's fancy that 'diamonds would overfill the sea' need not be criticised severely, though it is not consistent with the character of the subtle tempter who is carried away by the impulse of the moment, and whose sophistry can be accounted for. Milton perhaps here only meant 'pearls' or bright stones found in marine rocks.

736. *List* (arch.), listen; *coy*, slow to respond, shy. *cozened*, cheated, deceived. Note the alliteration in 'c' and its effect.

737. *vaunted*, boasted.

739. Comus explains his own view of life. Life is for enjoyment, and the beautiful must have a greater share of enjoyment than the rest. Beauty must be exhibited, and not hidden from the eyes of men. Lastly, Beauty (i.e. beautiful persons) must perpetuate itself by giving birth to beautiful children.

738. *beauty . . . . coin*, i.e. Beautiful persons are valuable necessaries, like money.

739. *current*, constantly in circulation.

740. *partaken bliss*, happiness shared with others.

738-41. Many Elizabethan writers argue that beautiful persons must perpetuate and increase beauty by marrying

and having children. The best-known exposition of this view is in Shakespeare's Sonnets. The idea recurs in Shakespeare in *Venus and Adonis*, and *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream* I, 1, 76-78.

> Earthlier happy is the rose distilled
> Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
> Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.

744. *brag*, boast, i.e. a thing of which Nature is proud.

745. *high solemnities*, i.e. high and solemn functions.

748. *homely*, plain, not attractive.

747. *they had . . . . thence*, ref. to 'homely.'

748-752. "Ugly women with bad complexions and rough cheeks may very well be occupied with household work : why should beautiful women take to similar occupations ? They are meant for something else . . ."

749. *cheeks . . . . grain*, *grain* may mean either 'colour' or 'texture' : hence, cheeks of an unattractive colour, or rough cheeks.

749-50. *ply the sampler*, to work on a sampler i.e. a piece of embroidery.

750. *tease*, to card, comb the fibres of (wool) etc.

huswife, housewife, mistress of a house.

751. *vermeil-tinctured*, coloured like *vermilion*—a bright red colour ; rosy, red.

752. *tresses like the morn*, i.e. hair bright or golden like the dawn : a popular description of hair, found in many poets.

755-60. An *aside*.

755. *I had . . . . lips*, I never intended to speak.

757. *charm*, bewitch, hypnotize.

as mine eyes, like my eyes.

759. a good criticism of the arguments of Comus.

758. *obtruding*, putting forward forcibly, thrusting upon me.

pranked, adorned, decked.

759-60 *bolt*, sift, i.e. select. The lady means that since Comus (Vice) is arguing very deftly, stating his views with great caution, it is absolutely necessary that she refute them, lest they should mislead.

762. *as if she would*, as if she wished.

riotous, indulging in loud revelry.

763. *cateress*, she who provides food.

767. *holy . . . . Temperance*, this is the real moral of the poem—the divine decree of Temperance (avoiding *all* excess): cf. *Il Penseroso* 45-6.

"And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,
Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet."

The Sixth Elegy also contains a similar idea.

768. *beseeming*, befitting, suitable.

769. *lewdly pampered Luxury*, Luxury indulged to such a degree of excess that it is nothing but gross animal enjoyment.

771. i.e. there would be a fair or just distribution of Nature's wealth.

772. each would have an equal (even) share, and none would get more than he deserves or needs.

773. Nature's burden also will be lighter. *no whit*, not in the least, not at all.

775. *swinish gluttony*, gluttons behaving like swine. In Spenser (*The Faerie Queene* I, 4) 'loathsome Gluttony' rides 'on a filthy swine.'

776. *ne'er looks to Heaven*, i.e. to thank in deep gratitude.

777. *besotted*, stupefied (with drinking etc.). *besotted base ingratitude* means ingratitude that results from stupefaction.

778. *crams*, fills (his stomach) to excess; *blasphemes his Feeder* talks irreverently about God.

766-778. Milton's own views expressed through a young divine creature who could hardly be credited with an adequate experience of the world. The practical suggestion, that Nature's wealth should be equally distributed, is made much more appealingly by Lear and Gloucester in *King Lear* (III, 4, 33-36; IV, 1, 68-72):—

"Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see,
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough."

The criticism of the ungrateful rich sounds very sincere and is quite in keeping with Milton's religious and political views.

781. *the sun-clad power of chastity* i.e., the dazzling lustre of chastity, that dims all sinful eyes. Cf. l. 425: 'The sacred rays of chastity.' Some suggest that Milton has in mind a sentence from the Bible: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: *a woman clothed with the sun.*" (*Revelation* XII, 1)

783. *thou hast . . . . apprehend*, because Comus has lost all the divine element in him, and is therefore incapable of understanding any spiritual doctrines.

785. *mystery*, truth known only to a few, to the initiated; revealed religious truth.

783-86. Milton discusses this 'sage and serious doctrine of Virginity' more fully in his *Apology for Smectymnus*. Here he points out how several writers of romance, and 'chiefly the divine volumes of Plato, and his equal Xenophon' taught him the meaning of Chastity and love.' Milton also cites a song from the *Book of Revelation* (XIV, 1-5) " . . . . and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. *These are they which were not defined with women; for they are virgins.* These are they which follow the Lamp whithersoever he goeth. These were the redeemed

from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb." (See *Intro.*)

787. *And thou art . . . . know*, i.e. your knowledge is quite in accordance with your present degradation. You are unworthy of knowing higher truths . . . .

789. *dear wit . . . . rhetoric*, ironical ; ref. to the elaborate arguments of Comus.

790. *dazzling fence*, i.e. brilliant use of words in an argument; 'arguing' is like 'fencing with words.' (Note that 'a master of fence' figuratively means 'a good debater.')

792. *uncontrolled*, uncontrollable, that cannot be restrained or resisted. *worth*, righteousness, power.

793. *rapt*, enraptured.

796. *brute earth* i.e., even the 'senseless' or 'irresponsive' earth; (from a phrase in one of the odes of Horace—'*bruta tellus*').

792-98. 'if I should try to do justice to the immense importance of my noble cause, I shall be moved to such passionate eloquence as will press even dumb and inanimate things into my service . . . .'

800-6. An *aside*.

799. *fables not*, does not tell fictitious tales, i.e. tells the truth.

800. *set off*, i.e., supported ; rendered more forcible and effective.

801. *though not mortal* i.e., though not a frail human being.

802-4. *as when . . . . crew*, the allusion is said to be to the fight between Zeus and the Titans, that lasted for ten years. The Titans were children of the primeval couple, Uranus and Ge. Comus or Saturn led the Titans. Zeus set free the Cyclopes, who gave him thunder and lightning. He could then defeat the Titans and finally hurl them into the under-world. *Erebus*, primeval Darkness. *Saturn*, same as the Gk. *Cronus* : he is also said to be the father of Zeus. (See O.C.C.L. or Smith's Cl. Dictionary.)

802. *the wrath of Jove*, the wrathful Jove.

803. *speaks thunder . . . . Erebus*. Note how the verb 'speaks' is used literally with one noun 'thunder', and figuratively with the other noun 'chains'.—This is a figure of speech called 'Zeugma.' *speaks thunder*, thunders forth; *speaks the chains of Erebus*: his wrath sends some to the chains of Erebus, to the prisons in Darkness (hell).

804. *I must dissemole* i.e. disguise my real intentions, or perhaps, conceal my fear.

806. *babble*, idle or childish talk.

807. *canon laws . . . .*, the 'holy' rules of *his* institution. *canon law* is really 'ecclesiastical law,' holy and inviolable. *canon* is used here contemptuously—indicating the contempt of Comus for 'religious' or 'moral' institutions.

foundation, institution.

808. *lees*, sediment or dregs, left after drinking wine.

suffer, allow.

809. *settlings*, i.e. dregs.

809. *melancholy blood*, a ref. to the views of ancient physiologists. According to them there were four principal liquids in the body, called *humours*—blood, choler, phlegm and melancholy (black bile). These humours governed the health and temperament of man. They were dependent on the four elements—choler on *fire*, phlegm on *water*, blood on *air*, and melancholy on *earth*. This idea is very frequent in Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and other Elizabethan writers.

808-9. *Yet . . . . blood*, Comus means that the strong moral sense of the Lady is merely the result of a diseased constitution: it is only the dregs of the dominating melancholy humour. It can easily be cured by his 'cordial julep' etc. Many editors, following Todd, quote the following lines from Nash's *Terrors of the Night*: "The grossest part of our blood is the melancholy humour . . . . It sinketh down to the bottom like the lees of the wine, corrupteth all the blood, and is the cause of lunacy."

S.D.- Note that the Brothers do not snatch Comus's wand : this is a convenient reason for prolonging the masque by introducing Sabrina.

813. *scape*, escape.

815. *rod reversed*, i.e. inverted, turned inside down.

816. *backward mutters*, repeating the charms from the end - beginning with the last word. The belief that the reversal of spells acts as an antidote is very common. Mr. Masson points out how even modern Mesmerists reverse their 'passes' to restore their patients.

of dissevering power, i.e. with power to destroy what has been done.

817-8. These lines suggest that the words of Comus were *not* an idle boast.

821. *Meliboes old*, a ref. to some old poet—especially one from whom Milton draws his information about Sabrina ; hence Geoffrey of Monmouth or Spenser. [Cf. Chaucer's well-known references to a poet 'Lollius' (*Troilus and Criseyde*) and Spenser's reference to Chaucer as Tityrus (*Shepherd's Calendar*).]

822. *soothest*, truest, or most trustworthy : the line is a good description of a pastoral poet. Note that *Meliboeus* is a Shepherd's name in Virgil's *Eclogues* (1).

824. *moist curb*, the control or power exercised over water. The nymph is the goddess of the river, and hence controls it.

825. *Sabrina*, see *Intro*.

826. *whilom*, formerly.

825. *daughter of Locrine*, Milton, in his *History of Britain*, narrates in prose the legend about Sabrina. The story starts with Brutus—the second founder of the British nation and the first founder of London. Like Lear he divided his kingdom into three and entrusted it to his three sons. Locrine the eldest got England, Camber got Wales and Albanact, Scotland. Soon the Huns, led by Humber, attacked the country and Locrine defeated them. Unfortu-

nately Locrine fell in love with a beautiful girl called Estrildis, left by the Huns as they ran away. Locrine was already engaged to Guendolen, a daughter of Corineus, ruler of Cornwall. Corineus insisted on the marriage ; and, though married to Guendolen, Locrine kept Estrildis concealed in his palace, where a very beautiful daughter, Sabra, (i.e. Sabrina) was born. Guendolen formed an army of the people of Cornwall, and defeated her husband's army; Locrine was killed by an arrow. Guendolen was not yet satisfied : so she threw the mother and daughter (Estrildis and Sabra) into a river, which since then has borne the daughter's name —(Severn – from Sabra). See also *Intro.* and *The Faerie Queene* II, 10, 14-19.

827. *Brute*, i.e. Brutus, the great grandson of Aeneas.

830. *the flood*, the river.

830. *commended . . . . flood*, i.e. the innocent maiden threw herself into the river.

831. *stayed*, stopped, obstructed ; *his*, its. The river in its course obstructed the flight.

83 . *water-nymphs*, Naiads (of springs, *rivers* etc.)

833. *pearled wrist*, i.e. wrists decked with pearls ; quite natural for *water-nymphs*.

834. *aged Nereus*, according to Homer, the 'Old Man' of the sea, and the father of the Nereids or sea-maidens—(O. C. C. L.). He was also known for his kindness and wisdom. Note that Severn is a river : hence it should have *Naiads* rather than Nereids, who are associated with the sea.

835. *reared*, raised. *Lank*, drooping, blending.

837. *nectared lavers*, large vessels (used for bathing) full of nectar.

strewed with asphodil, with the asphodil flowers in the water. Asphodil is an immortal flower in Elysium ; the common asphodil is a kind of lily.

838. *porch*, here, entrance, inlet ; as in *Hamlet* (I, 5, 63) where the Ghost says—

"And in the *porches* of mine ears did pour . . . ."

839. *ambrosial oils*, heavenly oils; (ambrosia is the food of the gods); the English equivalent of the phrase in Homer—*Iliad* XXIII, 186. Cf. "rose-sweet oil ambrosial" (Lang. Leaf and Myers, 455).

840. she was quickly (or suddenly) transformed into an immortal being (a goddess).

843. *visits the herds* . . . . i.e. acts as their guardian.

834. *Helping all urchin blasts*, destroying the influence of urchins.

Helping, helping against, counteracting, remedying.

Urchin blasts: The evil spirits sent blasts, i.e. diseases of cattle, plants, etc. *Urchin*, originally meant a hedge-hog, but afterwards came to be used for mischievous or evil spirits.

Ill-luck signs, portents of misfortune.

845. *shrewd . . . . elf*, an elf like Puck, very mischievous.

846. *vialed*, kept in *vials* i.e. small vessels.

848. *carol her goodness*.

841-46. Shakespeare's plays are full of references to the mischievous doings of small sprites; cf. especially, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*.

849. *garland wreaths* (a figure of speech called *tautology*), reminding us of Chaucer's use of two words with the same meaning in one line—one of Anglo-Saxon origin, the other of French. Note that *garland* comes from French and *wreath* from Anglo-Saxon.

850. *pinks*, kind of flowers; the name of the colour is derived from the flower.

851. *the old swain*, the old poet Meliboeus: but it should be noted that Milton departs from his sources considerably.

852. *clasping*, explained by 'chained up in alabaster';

Unlock the clasping charm, undo the charm by which she was turned into alabaster—a statue.

thaw, melt (destroy). *numbing* i.e. benumbing, depriving of sensation or movement.

853. *warbled*, sung gently (like birds).

854. *For maidenhood she loves*, cf. l. 825.

857. *adjuring*, requesting earnestly.

Song, sung by Lawes. The song closes with l. 865. With l. 866 the 'adjuring verse' begins.

860. *translucent*, generally, allowing light to pass, though not quite transparent; here *clear*.

861-2. The lines give us a splendid vision of the river-goddess—'plaiting her long, golden hair with wreaths (chaplets) of lilies.'

861. *twisted braids of lilies*, i.e. lilies intertwined so as to form braids.

862. *loose train*, i.e. the long, luxuriant hair, hanging like a 'train' (something that follows, like a retinue).

862. *amber-dropping*, yellow or golden, as if they were dropping amber. Two other interpretations are possible—(1) 'from which the yellow water of the river is dropping.' or (2) '(hair) that drop ambergris, found in seas.'

Mr. Verity cites a number of illustrations to show that the water of seas and rivers is often said to be yellow. ('Meander's amber waves'—Gray's *Progress of Poesy*; "The yelow Oxus"—Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, etc.)

866. The appeal to the goddess introduces us to several gods and goddesses associated with rivers. seas etc. in classical mythology. The idea of tutelary deities guarding springs, rivers, mountains, etc. is entirely classical, and hence there is nothing unusual if classical water-deities are requested to join in the invocation. Milton's poetry, like Shakespeare's, can easily transcend the narrow limits of space and time.

867. *Oceanus*, the father of all rivers; *Oceanus* is the river that encircles the whole world, and hence *the god of the river*. He is sometimes mentioned as one of the Titans.

868. *Neptune*, see note on l. 18 ; *earth-shaking*, because Neptune (Gk. Poseidon) is also the god of Earthquakes.

mace, the trident which he used as a sceptre.

869. *Tethys*, wife of Oceanus.

870. *hoary N'ereus*, see note on l. 834 ; *hoary*—with grey hair, old.

871. *Carpathian wizard*, Proteus ; according to Homer (*Odyssey* IV 350 et seq.) he is, like Nereus, a grand old man of the sea. He knows everything (hence *wizard*), and can assume any form he chooses (note the use of the adj. *Protean*=changing). He dwelt in the island of Carpathos according to later legends ; in Homer, he is an 'Egyptian.' He tended flocks of seals for Poseidon, and hence carries a shepherd's *hook*.

872. *scaly Triton*, Triton, who is half-fish, and hence has *scales*, (i.e. laminae protecting skin). He is said to be the son of Poseidon, and blows his conch to pacify the restless sea.

872. *winding shell*, i.e. the conch.

873. *Glaucus*, a god of the sea. He was originally a fisherman in Boeotia, but was transformed into a god by a herb he ate. He also possessed the gift of prophecy. *Spell*, i.e. charm.

874. *Leucothea*, lit. the *white goddess*, was a goddess of the sea. Her story has some resemblance to the story of Sabrina. Her original name was Ino, and she was the sister of Semele and wife of Athamas. Hera's jealousy was responsible for the death of Semele (she loved Zeus), and her (i.e. Semele's) child was given by Zeus to Ino for safety. But Hera's vindictive spirit made her pursue her vengeance. Ino's husband went mad and killed one of his own sons. Ino, with her other child, threw herself into the sea and emerged as Leucothea. Her son Melicertes was changed into the sea-god Palaemon—(see l. 875).

875. *her son*, see the above note.

rules the strands, because the Romans identified Palaemon with Portunus, the god of harbours (ports).

878. *Thetis*, one of the Nereids. It was prophesied that she would have a son who would outshine his father. Hence the gods made her marry a mortal, Peleus. Their son was Achilles.

tinset-slippered feet, i.e. with bright, shining feet; this is Milton's variation of Homer's constant epithet of Thetis —"silver-footed." Mr. Verity suggests that Milton must have intentionally avoided the more common epithet as it was being frequently used by poets.

877. *sirens*, see note on l. 253.

878. *Parthenope*, one of the Sirens: according to legend, her dead body was found near Naples (sometimes called Parthenope).

879. *Ligea*, a siren; according to Mr. Masson "the golden comb of Ligea is from stories of our own mermaids." (See Arnold's *The Forsaken Merman.*)

881. *sleeking*, making smooth or glossy.

884. *heave*, raise, lift.

886. *coral-paven*, i.e. made of coral.

886. *bridle in*, curb, restrain, check.

headlong wave, i.e. the rapid flow of the river.

S.D. Again a spectacular scene. Sabrina would be dressed like a goddess, and her nymphs would also add to the gorgeousness of the scene. (See *Intro.*)

889. *rushy-fringed*, i.e. fringed (edged) with rushes. A very queer compound—with two adjectives.

890. *osier dank*, damp osier (a kind of willow, used for making baskets, etc).

891. *sliding (chariot)*, i.e. rolling on the stream.

892. *agate*, a precious stone; (from Greek *Akhates*, the name of a river, where it was first found.)

azurn, blue like the sky; (derived from *azure* with the addition of *en* like *silvern, wooden*, etc.)

sheen, brightness, lustre (Anglo-Saxon *Scene*)

893. *tukis blue*, a gem called turquoise (from *Turk*).

893. (emerald) that wanders (i.e. moves here and there) in the channel.

894. *fleet*, swift.

896. *printless*, i.e. that leave no footprints. (Cf. *Tempest* V. 1. 34).

897. 'on the delicate cowslips'. *cowslips*, a yellow flower.

898. suggests the delicacy of the goddess, and also that her tread is not mortal. Cf. the following lin̂es from Keats—

"A lover would not tread
A cowslip on the head,
Though he should dance from eve till peep of day".
(*Endymion* IV)

903. *undo . . . .band*, put an end to the charm by which she is held in bondage.

905. *wile*, trick, cunning.

906. *unblessed enchanter vile*, i.e, the accursed, wicked magician (Comus)'.

911. *fountain*, probably refers to the source of the river. where the water is generally pure and undefiled.

912. *of precious cure*, (drops) possessing power to act as a remedy.

912-3. cf.

"If thou be'st a virgin pure
I can give a present cure . . ."
(Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*)

913. *thrice*, a significant number, like *forty*.

915. *venomed*, poisoned ; Rf. to the 'enchanted chair'— 1. 657 et. seq.

916. *glutinous*, sticky, like glue.

917. *chaste palms*, the palms of hands are chaste or pure. Notice how the virtue of chastity is again and again exalted. *Cold* is contrasted with *heat* in the above line and suggests chaste.'

918. *his*, its. 'The Lady has recovered from the spell'.

920. *Amphitrite*, the wife of Poseidon, the mother of Triton.

922. *Anchises' line*, Anchises was the father of Aeneas, and Aeneas the great-grandfather of Brutus; Brutus is the grandfather of Sabrina.

924-37. These lines must have had a special appeal to the audience at Ludlow Castle, as they confer a blessing on their river. It was quite customary in pastoral verse to invoke blessings or curses on rivers. (Cf. Amorets' speech, III, 1. 462-472, in *The Faithful Shepherdess*.)

923. *Brimmed waves*, water of the river filled to the brim.

924. *rills*, small streams.

924-7. i.e. 'may your tributaries supply you with plenty of water as usual, ...'

927. *drouth*, used in poetry for 'drought'; absence of rain ; hot weather continuing will dry up the water of the river.

singed (air) lit. burnt ; here, parched, Scorched etc. by the heat of the sun, i.e. blasts of hot air.

928. *tresses fair*, ref. to the goddess; or, as some suggest, ref, to trees, shrubs, on the banks.

930. *molten crystal*, i.e. water clear the (flowing) crystal.

931. *billows*, waves (a compliment to the river).
roll ashore, i.e. send to the banks.

932. *beryl*, a precious stone ; emerald is a *kind* of beryl.

933. *lofty head*, comparing the river to a goddess, or a maiden.

933-34. *may . . . . round*, 'may you be surrounded by towers and terraces—i.e. by flourishing towns'. Some interpret '*lofty head*' as the source of the river in the mountains ; but towns flourish *always* near the mouths of rivers rather than near the sources (e.g. many big ports of the world. It is better, therefore, to regard '*lofty head*' as a reference to the 'important portions' of the river.

935-6. 'and may groves of myrrh and cinnamon crown thy banks. . .' Both myrrh and cinnamon are frequently mentioned in descriptions of ideal landscapes ; but they belong essentially to Asiatic countries.

933-6. The syntax is obviously faulty. It is suggested that Milton must have had in mind two Greek verbs—one meaning 'to put a crown round', and the other 'to put a crown upon,' (see *Masson* III, 277).

941. *waste*, superfluous, unnecessary.

944. *gloomy covert*, the dark wood ; after leaving the palace of Comus they must pass through the forest.

gratulate his wished presence, welcome him whose coming they so much desired.

951. *jigs*, lively dances.

955. *the stars. . . . high*. There is some light from the stars, now seen in the sky.

956. Yet there is a good deal of darkness (Night).

S. D. There is a rapid change in the scene, and the stage will now present a very lively appearance with the President's Castle, and the general bustle of Ludlow. The Attendant Spirit, the Lady and the Brothers have finally made their way through the 'gloomy covert wide' and a good deal of time has elapsed since the last speech. The scene that begins now has a close resemblance to an anti-masque, as it contains a good deal of dancing and singing of 'country dancers' and introduces a less serious element.

958. *sunshine holiday*, i.e., bright holiday. (Cf. *L'Allegro* 98)

959. *without duck or nod*, without the awkward movements, involved in duck, etc., *duck* is used colloquially in the sense of 'to drop a curtsey', to show deference rather ceremoniously.

960. *trippings*, dances.

961. *of lighter toes*, i.e. of more refined persons. Cf. the *light* fantasic toe' (*L'Allegro*).

court guise, the style or manner of the court ; guise = manner or way.

962. *Mercury*, Gk. Hermes ; he is the messenger of the gods and has wings on his sandals ; hence referred to here for his swiftness.

963. *mincing*, moving or dancing with short dainty steps ; (in modern use, it denotes affectation).

Dryades, wood-nymphs.

964. *leas*, meadows, pastures.

S. D. Before this song was sung (by Lawes), there must have taken place graceful dances ('other trippings') in which the refined ladies and gentlemen took part. The dramatic illusion is really now over, and Lawes addresses the Earl and Countess of Bridgewater.

965. *Noble. . . . bright*, The Earl of Bridgewater and Lady Bridgewater.

967. *so goodly grown*, grown so beautiful, handsome.

969. *timely*, in good time.

971. *assays*, trials; 'another form of "*essay*", from French *essai* L, exagium).

972. cf. *The Epistle of James* I, 12.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

973-74. These two lines reiterate the moral of the poem—God has sent them to exult over the defeat of *Vice*—of lust and intemperance.

S. D. At the performance at Ludlow Caste, the epilogue consisted only of twelve lines, viz. 1011-1022. The rest of the epilogue was changed into a prologue (i.e. the necessary alterations were made) and spoken at the outset (975-1010). Thus the performance could begin with music by Lawes. Milton rightly reserves it as the *Epilogue*, inasmuch as it re-emphasises the moral of the poem.

975. That the lines echo the very music of Ariel's song; (*The Tempest* V. I, 88-94) has often been remarked ; but this is the general rhythm of many songs in Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and others : (see *Intro.*) The resemblance to the song of Ariel is felt on account of certain words (*such* and *fly*), and most of all, on account of the *rhymes*.

975. *ocean*, i.e. 'the Atlantic stream.'

976. *happy climes*, according to classical mythology, situated in the west. The 'happy isles' contain the famous garden of the Hesperides (cf. 1. 393). Milton refers to them in *Par. Lost* III 567-570, also cf. *Ulysses* (Tennyson) 63 :

"It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles".

976-78 i.e. where the sun never sets. (*Odyssey* IV)

979. *liquid*, flowing or bright ; pure.

981-82. See note on ll. one 393-96. The 'three daughters' have no definite parentage in mythology. They are variously spoken of as the daughters of Night, or of Phorcys and Ceto, or of Atlas and Hesperis (hence *Hesperides*) or of Zeus and Themis, or of *Heperus*—(see *Smith*). The *three* daughters are Aegle, Arethusa, and Hesperia. Accoring to some they are *four*, according to others, *seven*.

983. *crisped*, when used of hair or waves, the word means 'curly' ; probably here the word has the same meaning—referring to the movement of the branches.

984. *spruce*, prettily decked with flowers, trim or smart; derived from *Prussia* or Spruce).

jocund, jolly, merry.

985. *Graces* (Gk. Charitier, L. Gratiae.) They are the daughters of Zeus, and three in number (Euphrosyne, Aglaia and Thalia). "They were the goddesses who enhanced the enjoyments of life by refinement and gentle-ness." (*Smith*)

Hours (Horae), the goddesses of the seasons, usually represented as 'blooming maidens'; hence Milton's 'rosy bosomode.

988. *West winds*. They are said to spread fragrance. Personified as *Zephyrus* (For. *Zeph*—cf. Chaucer's *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* 4-5) Chaucer's Zephyrus eek with his swete breeth . . . ."

muskey, scented like musk.

989. *cedarn alleys*, paths lined with ceder trees.

990. *Nard*, fragrance of *nard*, an aromatic plant.

cassia, a kind of cinnamon.

991. *Iris*, the goddess of the rainbow.

humid bow, i.e, bow that contains water.

992. *blow*, cause to bloom.

994. *Purfled scart*, an embroidered scarf; a very apt description of rainbow. (*purfled* = *trimmed*, as in Chaucer's "his sleeves *y-purfiled* at the hond with gruys" *Prolague* 193. Note the *rhyme*.

991-4 . . . . the flowers in those happy climes present a more beautiful appearance than the rainbow itself . . . .

995. *Elysian*, heavenly, found in Elysium.

996. *List if your ears be true*, if you be not all Comuses.

997. *hyacinth*, tender, blue flower; often mentioned in poetry.

998. *Adonis*, born from a myrtle tree; he was very beautiful and Aphrodite (Venus) loved him from his birth. He was killed by a boar and the gods of the lower world took pity on Venus and allowed Adonis to spend six months every year on earth. The worship of Adonis was widely

practised in different Asiatic countries, and how it is agreed that Adonis must have been worshipped in connection with fertility rites. Aphrodite herself stands for "the fructifying principle of nature." The stay of Adonis in this world, therefore, symbolises the spring, with its fresh vegetation. It should be noted that even the blood he lost when wounded gave rise to the flower anemone. [References to the story of Venus and Adonis are innumerable: Milton mentions Adonis often: cf. *Par. Lost*. IX 440 : I, 446-52; Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, III; Shakespeare's '*Venus and Adonis*' and Keats's *Endymion*.]

999. *waxing well . . . . wound*, i.e. getting cured of his wound; *waxing*, growing. Milton mentions this wound in *Paradise Lost*, I, and calls it an 'annual wound.'

1001. *Assyrian queen*, i.e. Aphrodite connected with Eastern countries identified with the Asian goddess Astarte. She is also called *Cypris* (the Cyprian connecting her with Cyprus.)

1002. *in spangled sheen*, in glittering (like metal) brightness, or lustre.

1003. *Celestial Cupid*, i.e. heavenly Cupid : symbolising spiritual or heavenly love.

her, i.e. Aphrodite's. Probably Milton has in mind the distinction between the *two* aspects of Aphrodite, whom the Greeks worshipped. As Aphrodite, Urania she was the goddess of pure love; as Aphrodite Pandemos, she was the goddess of earthly love, or lust. Celestial would therefore be the son of Aphrodite Urania (*i e. of the sky*).

1004. *Psyche* (Gk. = soul) a very beautiful maiden of whom Venus herself grew jealous. She ordered Cupid to make her fall in love with an ugly man, but Cupid himself became enamoured of her. After some severe trials she was made immortal by Jupiter, and was united with her lover. (See *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius translated by Aldington.)

1003. *advanced*, elevated, raised high.

1005. *after . . . . long*, ref. to the trials of Psyche. Venus tried her in several ways—e.g., by asking her to sort out different kinds of grain from a huge heap, to go to Hades and fetch a casket, etc.

1010. *Youth and joy*, heavenly love is acompanied by perennial youth and joy.

975-1010. A very significant passage; noteworthy alike for its sensuous description of 'happy climes', and its wealth of suggestion. In this Land of the Blessed, there is eternal sunshine and eternal spring; and you are in the company of the Hesperides, the Graces, the rosy-bosomed Hours, of Adonis and Venus, of Cupid and Psyche, inhaling the odours of nard and cassia, in the midst of flowers whose beauty is not excelled even by the rainbow. The meaning suggested gives the very essence of Milton's poetry. Above all things stands, spiritual Love—love symbolised by Eros and Psyche. Earthly love is good; but celestial love is better; nay, it is the best. The soul after its many trials will, like Psyche, be united with eternal bliss. The note on which the poem closes is, therefore, a note of eternal joy—preaching the Divine Love which Christianity preaches.

1011. et seq. Cf. the Fairy's song—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* II, 1, 2-10.

1013. *earth's end*, ref. to Cape Verd islands, called *verdant* isles.

1014. *bowed welkin*, the vault of the sky, that appears to bend down so as to touch the earth.

1016. *corners of the moon*, cf. *Macbeth* (III, 5).

"Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound".

1013-16. the lines imply that the Spirit can go *wherever* it chooses.

1017-22. Milton in these lines sums up the teaching of the poem. The whole poem is pervaded by this supreme moral or spiritual truth—that virtue in its aspect of 'saintly, chastity' triumphs over the severest trials and temptations that assail it. Virtue is ever guarded by God

and must come out unscathed from the severest ordeal, all the stronger and more resplendent for all its trials in this world.

1019-20. Virtue takes you to the highest place you can imagine. *sphery chime*, ref. to the Pythagorean idea of the music of the spheres'. Each planet has music of its own, and thus there is eternal heavenly music in the air. (cf. the famous passage in the *Merchant of Venice V.*)

1021-22. i.e. God Himself is always ready to defend Virtue.

IV

LYCIDAS

Introduction

1. Occasion of the Poem : *Lycidas* was written in the autumn of 1637 on the occasion of the death of Edward King, a fellow-student of Milton's at Christ's College, Cambridge. The poem was published at Cambridge in the following year, along with other memorial verses, some in Latin, some in Greek, some in English, contributed by various members of the University. In the long vacation of 1637, King set out from Chester Bay in a vessel bound for Dublin with the intention of visiting his relatives. On August 10, in an absolutely calm weather, the ill-starred ship struck a rock on the Welsh coast, and sank. A few of the passengers were saved. Among those who perished was Edward King. The news of his tragic death came as a shock to his college friends, and they resolved to record their affection and grief in a book of memorial verses. There was some delay in the completion of the work, and so it came out next year. Twenty-three poems were in Latin and Greek, and thirteen in English, *Lycidas* being the longest in the latter group.

The account of Edward King's death, as given in the introduction to the memorial verses, reads as follows : "Not far from the British shore, when the ship was dashed on to a rock, and though the billow leaped and gaped, while the other voyagers busied themselves in vain with mortal life, he aspiring after the immortal threw himself upon his knee, and as he prayed was swallowed up by the waters, along with the vessel, and gave his life to God, on the 10th of August, in the year of salvation 1637, of his life twenty-five."

2. Argument : In this pastoral elegy, Milton mourns over the death of his friend, Edward King, under the guise of a shepherd mourning over the death of another shepherd.

Milton begins the poem with an invocation to the Muse for help in his poetic effort, for he is going to mourn in verse over the untimely death of Lycidas who was drowned in the sea.

Under the guise of pastoral imagery, Milton recalls his life with Edward King at the University. They went for walks together and studied together, and their poetic exercises were submitted to the approval of the same tutor. They shared a common life at the University. But now, alas, Lycidas has departed and can never return. His brother shepherds as well as the woods and caves and trees all grieve at his untimely loss.

Where were the nymphs when their beloved Lycidas died? They were certainly not anywhere near the place where Lycidas was drowned; not on the steeps known to the old Bards and Druids (i.e. the mountains of North Wales), nor on the top of Mona nor by the stream of the Deva (the Dee). But had the nymphs been there, what could they have done to avert the disaster? Had the Muse herself been able to save her own son, Orpheus, when he was killed by the frenzied Thracian women ?

This thought about the frail and uncertain tenure of human life leads Milton to a digression. If even a life of the finest intellectual promise, like that of Lycidas, is liable to be cut short prematurely, then what is the use of our aspiring to lead an austere, intellectual life? The love of fame makes us scorn delights and live laborious days; but if fate cuts short our life before we earn the reward of fame, are not our labours wasted fruitlessly? Would it not be better, therefore, to refrain from severe intellectual labour and to use one's poetic talents to write pleasant, amatory verse, as some poets do?

> Were it not better done as others use.
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade
> Or with the tangles of Neacra's hair?

Milton states this argument only to condemn it as unworthy; for true fame is not a plant that grows on mortal

soil, it is not the applause of the multitude, but the approval of the all-judging God in Heaven. And of that supreme reward of noble endeavour, premature death cannot deprive a man.

Milton then reverts to the main theme of the poem, and presents before us three figures in succession, who lament the death of Lycidas. First comes the Herald of the sea, Triton, who says that the death of Lycidas was not due to tempestuous weather but to unseaworthiness of the ship itself, which was built in an eclipse. Next comes Camus, the local deity of the Cam, footing slowly like his own sluggish stream and expressing sorrow at the loss to Cambridge of one of her darling sons. Lastly, comes St. Peter, the guardian of that Church of Christ for the service of which Lycidas had been destined. In a passionate and bitter passage, St. Peter laments the loss to the church of a true shepherd like Lycidas, at a time when the church is infested with false and venal shepherds, who neither care nor know how to discharge their duties and, by their ignorance and indifference, allow the people to perish spiritually or become a prey to the wiles of the Roman Catholic Church. But vengeance is soon at hand for these false and wicked shepherds.

From this minatory digression on the corruptions of the Church, Milton turns back to the theme of the poem and calls upon the velleys of the landscape and the banks of the streams to yield up all their choices flowers to be strewn over the dead body of the Lycidas. But, alas, it is only a fond fancy, a momentary forgetfulness; for the dead body of Lycidas is not anywhere on land at all, but whelmed amid the sounding seas, either sunk deep down to the bottom or drifted northwards to the Hebrides or perhaps southwards to Cornwall and St. Michael's Mount.

The mood of the poem now suddenly changes, as in all pastoral elegies, from lamentation to consolation. Milton consoles himself by the reflection that though Lycidas is dead, he is not lost. By the power of Christ, he has been saved, and a higher world than the earth has received him. There he lives in the society of the Saints, listening to

heavenly music and waving his oozy locks in the streams of heaven. He has become the genius of the shore near which he was wrecked and drowned, and will thenceforth protect those who sail on those dangerous seas.

Thus sang the rude shepherd in varied strains in the Doric style of pastoral poetry. When the sun had gone down, he gathered his mantle round him and departed from the place, resolved to seek fresh woods and new pastures on the following day.

3. Who is Lycidas? Lycidas is the name of a shepherd in Virgil's ninth Eclogue. But the name appears to be of still more ancient origin. Lycidas is a goat-herd in the seventh idyll of Theocritus, a Greek poet and the father of pastoral poetry. The name occurs also in the second idyll of Bion Lycidas is, therefore, a conventional pastoral name. Milton adopts it, in his poem for Edward King, his fellow student at Christ's College, Cambridge.

Edward King was the son of Sir John King, Secretary for Ireland to Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I. He was admitted to Christ's College, on June 9, 1626, under Chappell, Milton's tutor. He was made Fellow on June 10, 1630, "It was rather hard for Milton, now in his twenty-third year, to see a youth of eighteen above him at the Fellows' table."

"He whose untimely death he laments in Lycidas was one King, a fellow-collegian and an intimate friend. King, too, was something of a poet (only Latin pieces by him are extant). He was a fellow and tutor of his college, and otherwise, it would seem, a notable member of his university; hence Father Cam is one of his chief mourners. He was designed for holy orders, as Milton himself had been once; hence St. Peter's grief for his loss"—*J. W. Hales*.

4. Elegy and Pastoral Elegy: "The elegy is a poetic type once distinguishable by its form but no longer so, the ground of classification having shifted from one of form to one mainly of subject-matter. This change in the conception of elegy makes it difficult to arrive at a satisfactory defini-

tion of the species, and the best we can hope to do here is to state what the term "elegy" used to mean and what it means now.

In Greek literature, where the word is first met with, it is used so as to include war-poems, marching-songs, political verses, sententious poetry, love-songs and lamentations for the dead,—in short, poetry dealing with a wide range of subjects, both grave and gay, the only restriction being, apparently, that it must be written in the elegiac measure, a distich composed of a dactylic hexameter in combination with a dactylic pentameter.

Very much more limited is the use of the word in modern times, when Elegy has come to mean a mournful or plaintive poem, most often in the form of a lament for the dead, and, even when dealing with subjects other than death, such as, for example, unrequited love, always serious and melancholy in tone, by reason of the poet's yearning for what is no longer present. Other pieces of a reflective nature, which do not entirely comply with this definition, are sometimes loosely termed "elegiac" in quality, but they are not true elegies . . . .

. . . . the elegy has no distinctive marks in English: numerous metres have been successfully employed : but it is clear that, since elegy is most often an expression of plaintive tenderness or of grief, the simplest metres, or at least those in which the framework is least in evidence, generally meet with the greatest success. Thus, for example, the irregular metre of Milton's *Lycidas* . . . . while it enchants the ear with its music does not readily disclose the source of this charm, and leaves the mind free to attend to the sentiment of the poem. On the other hand, though the sonnet has not infrequently been used for elegy, its obtrusive metrical system makes it, for the most part, unsuitable for this purpose, since the constraint put upon the poet by its form may call into question the sincerity of his expression . . . .

. . . .

In addition to those qualities which distinguish the elegy as an independent lyrical species, the following points are

worthy of notice :—

(1) The best elegies, though written as a rule, when the sense of loss is keen and recent, do not affect the feelings violently, but by their tenderness and delicacy of thought induce a form of melancholy at once artistic and not unpleasing.

(2) The poet in his elegy often recalls the places and incidents associated with the dead, whose memory he celebrates: as, for example, in Arnold's *A Southern Night* . . . . . or in Cowper's lines on his mother's picture.

(3) In many cases there is, usually towards the end of the poem, a transition from sadness to joy as the writer's faith in a future Life triumphs over his sorrow and sense of loss. In *Lycidas*, for example, the change occurs at the lines beginning :—

> "Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more ;
> For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,"

while in Cowper's *On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture* . . . . it is usually well marked in the passage beginning :—

> "Could Time, his flight reversed restore the hours."

This change frequently corresponds with the beginning of the third and final stage . . . ."—*Norman Hepple.*

The pastoral elegy, as *Lydidas* is, is an elegy with a pastoral setting and background, and so a shepherd is made to mourn a dead shepherd. It is derived from Greek poets, Bion and Moschus. It has a certain convention ; the poet must speak in terms of a shepherd, employ the imagery of shepherd-life, sketch and landscape familiar to the shepherd, giving rustic colour and tone and bringing in flocks of sheep and other shepherds who must have the gift of song, and describe the whole action as against the background of a shepherd's life and activities. The Renaissance established the vogue of the pastoral elegy.

Sir E. K. Chambers thus traces the history of the pastoral: "Firstly, there is the remarkable novel, *Daphnis and Chloe*, in which, about the fifth century after Christ the Greek prose-

writer Longus strove to give an entirely new form to the conventions of Theocritus. *Daphnis and Chloe*, with its early traces of 'romantic' love, its early passion for scenery, is undeniably a notable ancestor of the later pastoral developments of the romance, as they present themselves in Sannazaro, in Montemayor, in Sidney. Secondly, there is the *pastourelle* of mediaeval France, a short lively poem, half-dialogue, half-recital—in some degree Provencal in origin and always constant to a single type of structure. A noble youth meets a shepherdess in the fields; he dismounts to woo her, is successful or unsuccessful in his love, and in either event mounts and rides away . . . . The typical incident of the *pastourelle* has left its trace upon the love-stories of Florizel, and many another distinguished Elizabethan prince, and the name of Robin recurs in the eclogues of Clement Marot, to which the author of *The Sepherd's Calendar* recognizes his debt. And finally, one must not leave out of account the Pastoral affinities in the one book which of all others most profoundly impressed the Englishmen of the sixteenth century. The Old and New Testaments, accessible at last in the splendid new words of Tyndale and Coverdale, yielded each its episodes of pastoral life. The Old gave them David, with his idyllic boyhood among the sheepfolds; the New that wakeful night of the shepherds under the same starry heavens of Bethlehem, already a theme familiar for its quaint renderings in the miracle-plays of the north; nor could it be forgotten how in parable, deliberate choice had been made of the Good Shepherd to serve as a symbol for the Founder of Christianity himself, of the faithful shepherd and hireling as types respectively of the just and unjust amongst his appointed teachers. So that pastoral came to have its clear ecclesiastical signification, and it fell out naturally for Spenser or Milton to adapt to the bucolic forms their allegories of the religious life. And it was characteristic of the medley of ideas which everywhere distinguishes Renascence art, that the pastoral should thus absorb into itself pagan and religious elements and present them side by side without fear of incongruity; Peter mourning in the company of Triton and the Muses over the hearse of Lycidas while "the mighty Pan" must do duty in *The Shepherd's Calendar*, alike for the wood-god of

classical myth, for the historic Henry the Eighth, and for the very person of the Almighty."

Now the points may be summed up : In a pastoral elegy, the pastoral convention—the imagery, background and scenery of pastoral poetry, which originated with the Greek poet, Theocritus, is adapted to a song of lament. It is eminently a product of the Renaissance; Spenser and then Milton gave it a vogue. They also added a new element to it—the Christian theology. For this they had a precedent in Virgil, for Virgil who imitated Theocritus, modified the character of pastoral poetry by introducing into it religious and political matters. In the age of the Renaissance the pastoral reflected the poet's personal reflections on current life instead of being restricted to the loves and songs of shepherds and with the rural landscape as the background of a carefree and peaceful life ; in fact, the pastoral convention was put to a varied use. So in *Lycidas*, the poet makes the pastrol convention—the imagery and scenery of pastoral poetry—the vehicle of his personal grief, of his poetic aims and ambitions, of his religious views.

5. Lycidas as a Pastoral Elegy : (*i*) *Pastoralism as a literary fashion in Elizabethan England* : Pastoral Elegy may be briefly defined as a shepherd's song of lament for the death of his companion. It came into fashion in Elizabethan England. There was a revival of classical studies—a movement that was known as the Renaissance, which began in Italy, and then spread to France and England. The pastoral elegy was a product of Renaissance culture. Spenser set the example with his *Astrophel*, written in memory of Sir Philip Sidney. In fact pastoralism then seemed to have invaded drama, poetry, and even prose. As an example of the latter we may take Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, an elaborate pastoral romance, written to amuse his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. We see how the fashion caught on, when Lodge's *Rosalynde*, a pastoral romance, was so popular, and supplied the story of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. But we are concerned here with the pastoral elegy, which is but a phase of the prevalent pastoralism. For pastoral elegy, Elizabethan poets found their model in the *Lament for Adonis* by the

Ionian poet, Bion, and in the *Lament for Bion* by the Syracusan poet, Moschus. It is an extremely artificial kind of verse, thrown forth in a period of reaction and decadence. The artificiality of the thing will be obvious when a shepherd (the poet who is the chief mourner, poses as shepherd) is made to mourn the death of a companion (who might himself be a poet) in terms of the pastoral convention. *i.e*. bringing in other shepherds with their oaten pipes, the sylvan deity, Pan, or Satyrs and Fauns, goat-shaped deities who have become associated with the pastoral convention. In a pastoral elegy the grief expressed, though there is no reason to doubt its sincerity, becomes almost incidental. It is more or less an exercise of a decorative fancy, touched by pensive reflection. Renaissance seems to play a large part in it, for it abounds in classical allusions, poetical compliments to bards and ancient, in fact evoking buried places of thought and association.

(*ii*) *Main characteristics of Milton's pastoral elegy* : We find more or less all these characteristics in Milton's *Lycidas*. He mourns the death of his college-friend, Edward King, but the grief is expressed through the haze and glimmering of a poetic fancy. Milton fancies himself to be a shepherd, mourning the death of his companion, another shepherd. Take the following lines :

> For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
> Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill,
> Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd,
> Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,
> We drove afield.

And so Milton goes on, evoking the occupation of shepherds, their "rural ditties," the dance of Satyrs and Fauns. We are transported into an ideal world—the Arcadia that exists only in the poet's imagination. This idealization is a part of the pastoral. It seems to be all unreal and fantastic. But we cannot get at the heart of the thing unless we penetrate through the whole symbolism. "The self-same hill" stands for Cambridge ; the feeding of the flock can mean only companionship in study, and the "rural ditties," exercises in

Latin verse ; Satyrs and Fauns have been supposed to refer to college friends. We should note another point here : as Milton develops the theme of grief, with which come to be associated Milton's poetic ambition, thought of self-discipline and tirade against the corrupt church, he manages to pay compliments to the classical poets to whom he is indebted. It is also part of the convention of pastoral elegy. For example, when Milton writes,

> O fountain Arethuse and thou honour'd flood,
> Smooth-sliding Mincius crown'd with vocal reeds—

he honours both Theocritus and Virgil. The fountain Arethusa is associated with Theocritus, the poet of Syracuse and the father of pastoral poetry, and the river Mincius is associated with the Roman poet, Virgil, who imitated Theocritus in his *Eclogues*. There allusions to classical poets, especially those who distinguished themselves in pastoral poetry, are gracefully interwoven with Milton's lament for his friend,

(*iii*) *Landscape-painting in pastoral elegy*. Then again in pastoral elegy there is a description of some sort of landscape. It is also a *poetical* landscape in keeping with the spirit of the whole composition. The landscape, of which much remains vague, is barely sketched or alluded to as a background. Even if there are specific details, they are not worked up into a whole. So in the beginning Milton mentions,

> "The woods, and desert caves,
> With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
> And all their echoes—

which are represented as mourning Lycidas. But there are, throughout the poem, place-names, famed in classical poetry —and they are rich in "storied" association. These serve to lend variety to the poem, and relieve the tone and mood of grief. It should be remembered that in the Elizabethan age there was no nature-poetry strictly so called; we should not, therefore, look for any transcripts of nature in *Lycidas*. Later in the poem there is an attempt at describing a flowery

landscape. Here too it should be noted that the flowers mentioned have been long celebrated in verse; the description can be easily matched in Spenser, or in any of his followers. It will not be right to say that the description of the flowers here is the result of Milton's personal observation. It is only poetical and conventional; it is rather bookish :

> Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
> Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
> On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,
> Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes
> That on the green turf suck the honied show'rs
> And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.

It is all vague and general, but it is good poetry ; no picture is called up to the mind. This description of a landscape generalised, unlocated—an "airy nothing" a figment of the imagination, having nothing to do with actual observation, always enters into the scheme of a pastoral elegy.

6. **Lycidas as a Pastoral Elegy:** It belongs to the kind of poetry which we call the pastoral elegy, that is, it is an elegy in the shape of a song sung by a shepherd mourning for a dead companion, and is full of conventional bucolic imagery. For the origin of this particular type of elegy we have to go back to the pastoral poetry of Greek literature, and especialy to the "Lament for Adonis" by the Ionian poet Bion, and the "Lament for Bion" by Moschus of Syracuse. At the time of the revival of learning when the masterpieces of Greek and Latin antiquity became the objects of unbounded and indeed indiscriminating admiration, the pastoral elegy, like all other kinds of classical poetry, passed into modern European literature, and in this, as in other cases, admiration led to imitation. Thus Spenser's "Astrophel," a memorial poem on the death of "the most noble and virtuous knight, Sir Philip Sidney," is conceived and executed upon the strict lines of the Greek pastoral elegy, and in its extreme artificiality may indeed be regarded as a typical example of the courtly-classic taste which prevailed in non-dramatic literature during the Elizabethan age. These lines

Milton again follows in "Lycidas,"in which, instead of expressing directly his sorrow for the loss of his friend, he adopts the convention of a lamenting shepherd, the bucolic tone and manner which had become inseparable from the elegiac tradition, and all the accessory pastoral details of the well-established academic form. It is important to lay stress upon the purely derivative character of Milton's machinery and to refer this to its true sources as otherwise we shall be very apt to find fault with the poem, as Johnson found fault with it, for its want of nature and truth. Edward King, we may say, was a young college man of seventeenth-century England, and not a shepherd; he had no connection, save in literature, with the Fauns and Satyrs who are here made his companions; he and Milton never tended sheep together; in a word, the whole setting of the poem is a piece of elaborate and unconvincing make-believe. But we must remember that in this sort of criticism we are expressing the taste of our time and are making no allowance for that of Milton's age, and that to him and to his classically trained readers what seems to us so artificial appeared perfectly natural and fitting. Moreover, while Milton reproduces all the stereotyped Arcadian externals of his models, he does nonetheless contrive to keep very close to actuality. 'Through the guise of all the pastoral circumstances and imagery,' as Masson well says, 'there is studious representation of the facts of King's brief life and his accidental death, and of Milton's regard for him, and academic intimacy with him.' Here we may note the extreme interest of the passage already referred to—the passage beginning: 'For we were nursed upon the self-same hill. In this, under the conventional forms of pastoral expression we have a clear rendering of personal history. 'The hill,' as Masson explains, 'is, of course, Cambridge; the joint feeding of the flock is companionship in study; the rural ditties on the oaten pipe are academic iambics and elegiacs; and old Damoetas is either Chappel (Milton's first tutor)......or some more kindly Fellow of Christ's".—*W. H. Hudson*.

7. How does Lycidas appeal to the modern taste? To the modern taste *Lycidas* will have little appeal. The very artificiality of the form will present a difficulty. A

student of Greek will think it but a pale imitation of Bion and Moschus. There can be no genuine pleasure in imitation. A modern reader may very well regard *Lycidas* a *tourt de force*. There has been lately a reaction against Milton, and caught in such reaction a reader finds little in *Lycidas* to attract him. Milton has ever been praised for his style, and that is a thing of art, unaffected by time or any change in fashion. And style means a lot of things in Milton—the organ music of his verse, his imagery (which rather tends to the abstract than the concrete), his effective use of Latinism and classical allusion, the verse-structure with its shifting of stress and caesura, etc. The content of the poem is artificial, and if there is any accent of genuine grief, it seems to be smothered in the superabundance of classical bucolic imagery and mythological allusions. The subject-matter cannot stir either the feeling or imagination of a modern reader. If an approach is made to *Lycidas* as pure art abstracted of all content, we discover an imperishable beauty in it. We cannot believe that pastoral elegy will ever be naturalised in English. Not even the genius of Milton could naturalise it. A pastoral elegy can be written accordingto a formula. Milton follows that formula, and yet Milton's *Lcyidas* is something more than a pastoral elegy. Milton's poetry is too full of Milton himself. If in *Lycidas* Milton has much to say about his college friend through the haze of conventional imagery, he tells us much more about himself. The very ego of Milton, which seems to live in every line of his verse, does not, as it should in the case of any other poet, repel us, but rather attracts us. If we still read and delight in *Lycidas* despite its outworn convention and its unfamiliar imagery, it is because we gain access, in *Lycidas*, to the inner chamber of an imposing and majestic personality—we at once become familiar with Milton, the poet's dreams and aspirations, his austerity of character, his seriousness of purpose and vocation, the genius and personality of Milton stand imaged in *Lycidas*. As a pastoral elegy, pure and simple, it has little value and meaning. Critics who praise the poem so highly, apart from the richness of its melody and the sustained effect of its style, seem to be hardly conscious that Milton the Man,

and not Milton the Poet, is the haunting mystery to them. The final appeal of *Lycidas*, we must say, boils down to Milton's self. We try to judge and evaluate the poem as a pastoral elegy, but in the background of our mind there is always the towering personality of Milton. We are not staggered by the incongruous elements in the poem—the Christian theology, the poet's puritanic austerity and denunciation of the corrupt church. Why ? Because they are all a revelation of Milton's personality, and Milton's personality ever haunts and waylays our minds. The positive defects of *Lycidas* as a pastoral elegy are just passed over as we are carried along in the sweep of its majestic verse. Milton makes the form of pastoral elegy which he adopts in *Lycidas* subservient to his own purpose. *Lycidas* cannot be regarded as a typical pastoral elegy. Milton brings extraneous elements into it.

8. Has Lycidas the true spirit of a pastoral elegy ? : Another question may arise. *Lyicdas* has the form of pastoral elegy, but has it the spirit too ? In the pastoral elegies, written by Bion and Moschus, there is, it is true, genuine grief, however softened in accent, but we must confess, it is grief artificialised. Milton of course follows the same tradition. But is there not a too serious note in Milton's poem ? Preoccupied as he is with his serious and austere view of a poet's vocation, he hints that he is to part company with his contemporaty poets who wrote light, airy love-songs' looking upon poetry as a mere pastime or an amusement of the hour. Milton breaks into a higher strain when he speaks of fame. In a pastoral elegy a poet may incidentally glance at the function of a poet, or the neglect with which his poetry is treated. But in Milton's *Lycidas* the reflection has a heightened tone. The temper and spirit of Milton's poem seems to be so different from that of a pastoral elegy. The only defence that can be put forward for thus making the artificial form of pastoral elegy a mode of self-expression is that it easily lends itself to symbolism. A mere imitation of the form itself would have it a dead thing. The Renaissance poets of England with Spenser as their master were sensible enough to exploit the symbolism of the artificial form of pastoral elegy. This keeps *Lycidas* still alive, and

this reconciles us to the difficulty of acclimatising ourselves to an alien world of shepherds, their oaten pipes, their plaintive strains, the conventional landscape with its typical birds and flowers, all in keeping with the spirit and atmosphere of a make-believe.

9. Milton as the subject of 'Lycidas' : *Lycidas* does much more than express grief for the death of King. It is the last great poem of Milton's first poetic period. Recent criticism has come to concentrate more on the revelation of the poet's personality than on the poets attitude towards King, or his grief, which finds so refined and literary an expression. It has been said that, "fundamentally, *Lycidas* concerns Milton himself. King is but the excuse for one of Milton's personal poems"—which is but echoing Legouis : "It is not King but Milton who should be sought in them" (i.e. the two hundred lines of *Lycidas*). Milton, great poet that he was, could never forget his own self. It is not strange that *Lycidas* became an invaluable commentary on his mind, as it was growing and taking shape for its great mission. The overture and the *coda* are wholly concerned with Milton himself. In the first, he tells us why he ventures on poetic composition before his genius had matured. The Latin motto on Lawes' edition of *Comus* is generally taken as an expression of the poet's doubts about the propriety of printing the masque. May it not be taken as an expression of his feeling that his poetic development was yet incomplete *Lycidas* preludes with an elaborate expression of it : 'utter constraint and sad occasion dear' are alone responsible for this rude shock given to the Muses. Lines 15-22 show that 'Milton's melodious tear' does not quite spring from personal sorrow for a friend's death ; it is also inspired by the selfish motive that his own death should be mourned by some poet, even as he mourned King :

"So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destined urn,
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace to my sable shroud !"

Why should Milton think about death at all ? Mr. Tillyard

goes to the extent of suggesting that the fears of premature death may have some connection with the plague that was devastating England (and Horton had not escaped) in 1636 and 1637. It is quite natural that Milton began to meditate on death when he saw it all around him, especially death from accident, like King's and that he consoled himself with the thought that his fame will outlive himself. It should be noted here that the passage does not mention any fear of early death, but only speaks of 'destined urn.' The great interest of these thoughts, however, lies in the fact that Milton was at this time thinking not only in terms of great poetry but in terms of the *immortality* that great poetry would confer on him. The lines should be read along with those on Fame. Milton was not only thinking of his real mission but also of the *immortality of fame*, as he admits in his letter to his friend Diodati. 'That last infirmity of noble minds' had taken a firm hold of his mind also. Lines 22-63 are the most significant in our consideration of King's relations with Milton. They describe the life at Cambridge —the life which had left so many sweet memories for the poet. The two were associated very closely in a number of pursuits and even under the thick garb of pastoralism (that so much irritated Dr. Johnson!) we detect a note of real sorrow. The most poignant are the two lines that have the simplicity that accompanies all genuine expression of sorrow :

"But, oh ! the heavy change, now thou art gone.
Now thou art gone and never must return !"

But the poet again remembers his oaten pipe, and with a number of beautiful similes measures the great loss. The address to the Nymphs must be allowed as an excuse for the vagrant imagination of Milton that travels in space and time without any check. But, presently, he remembers the stark actuality and cries—'Ay me! I fondly dream.' For even Orpheus was torn to pieces and his mother could do nothing but watch! What then of a mere mortal, like King?

Milton turns to himself once again, and reflects on the high office of the poet, the worth-whileness of self-dedication

to learning and lofty poetry, where all noble endeavour may be abruptly ended by the merciless scissors of Atropos. Would it not be better to potter away one's days over dainty love lyrics, like many of his contemporaries of the Caroline age? Writing such stuff is for him like sporting with Amaryllis in the shade and with the tangles of Neaera's hair. Once again his thoughts turn to death, especially premature death, for he is afraid that all his elaborate preparation for his *magnum opus* would be more than useless if the icy hand of death were to snatch him away before his work was known to the world. There is obviously a reference in these lines to the busy years he spent at Horton—scorning delights and living laborious days. Some suspect a glance at his own theory and practice of chastity in the contemptuous mention of Amaryllis and Neaera. The poet's temporary fit of despondence for the fate of King makes him acutely anxious about his *own* future. If he too were to follow the path of his friend, how shattered would be all his dreams of immortal fame!

> "But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
> And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
> Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
> And slits the thin-spun life."

But Phœbus comforts him, and the poet is again in a state of calm; it is fame in Heaven that matters, not the world's cheap flash-in-the-pan.

Milton has thus passed through one crisis in the poem —his fears about sudden death, and all that it might mean —to his long-cherished ambition. He picks up the thread once again, and gives us a few details about King's death. But the mention of the Pilot of the Galilean Lake allows him no respite. His attitude towards another important question,—this time, religion—needs a forceful expression. And Milton's skill is best seen in the way he works up to this important judgment on the contemporary state of religion. The passage 103-131 has sometimes been called a 'digression.' It is necessary to bear in mind, however, that King was meant for the Church, and St. Peter has every

right to maintain that preachers who are really wanted by England are snatched away in their bloom, and thousands of priests who know nothing about Christ's religion fatten on the substance of the church. The thought is not at all irrelevant ; it is the *tone* of the speech, and the length of the passage that reminds us that we are no longer thinking of King, but of Milton. The poet seems to be on the point of losing his temper when he uses phrases like—

> "their lean and flashy songs
> Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw."

But all this is righteous indignation. And we learn a good deal about Milton's championship of *true* religion against *false*. In English literature alone can such poetic attacks on the corruption of the clergy be found. If the priests themselves are bent on satisfying their own physical needs, and nothing else, what must be the state of true religion in England? As Chaucer beautifully put it, 'If gold rust, what shall iron do?' St. Peter ends his speech with a threat—the two-handed engine will ruthlessly hew down the poisonous branches of the Church. So temper runs away with sobriety of thought, and tempestuous wrath envelops the Muse's light in smoke.

This may be regarded as the second crisis in 'Lycidas'—where the poet is again in a ruffled state. But this crisis also is followed by calm, and with the return of Alpheus, 'the dread voice is past.' The poet recovers rapidly and writes some of the best flower-poetry in the language. King is in the foreground again and Milton faces the stern reality of his death with perfect equanimity. Lines 165-85 from a glorions close to the poem, dealing not only with the fate of King but the poet's too. They express his new-found solace,—the realization that death is not the end of everything. There are things mightier than death. If the angels themselves wipe the tears of Lycidas and if he has now the high privilege of listening to "the unexpressive nuptial song" there is no cause for tears,—O shepherds ! no cause ! Lycidas enjoys bliss unknown to mortals in this world.'

In the Epilogue; that is, the last eight lines, Milton "speaks directly, criticises what he. has just written in his

imaginary character, and intimates that he has stepped out of that character, and is about to turn to other occupations. Still the close is ideal, and studied from other pastoral poems."

10. The poetry of "Lycidas" : Though there may be conflicting views about the merits of *Lycdias* as an elegy, all agree that it contains some of the best poetry that Milton ever wrote.

Lycidas, like many well-known passages in *Paradise Lost*, splendidly harmonizes scholarship and poetry. It is full of echoes of the pastoral poets of antiquity as well as of his own day, of Greece no less than of England. Its phrases and ideas recall Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, and Spenser. Among the more important conventions he borrows may be mentioned the procession of mourners, the conceit that all objects in Nature mourn the death of Lycidas, the apostrophes to the Nymphs and to the fountain Arethuse, to Alpheus and to 'woeful shepherds'. *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis* show a close resemblance to Moschus's *Lament for Bion* and Bion's *Lament for Adonis*. It is not, however, Milton's erudition that attracts the general reader, but the emotion that is expressed with the help of that erudition. And thus the poet appears not like a simple peasant mourning the death of his friend, but like a poet-philosopher, meditating on Death and other subjects. The poem is, therefore, not a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, but emotion recollected in tranquillity. It has greater serenity and majesty than a simple lament can claim. It is also more elaborate in form, and affords greater scope for beauty of phrase. The depth of the poet's feeling is easily discernible, though the feeling is *not* always for Lycidas. The death of Lycidas is not merely a personal loss ; it is a loss to the University, to Religion,—to Nature herself. And all the thoughts that flock to the poet's mind are expressed with great sincerity. If there is any artificiality in the manner of conveying the emotion, we cannot forget that this very artificiality introduces greater order and conduces to finish and grace of style. The changing moods of the poet necessitate a change in tone from para-

graph to paragraph, turning the poem into a grand symphony. The supreme excellence of *Lycidas*, therefore, lies in the poet's handling of these different moods, and in maintaining throughout an impression of unity. There is a wave-like rise and fall in the emotion, to which the expression always adapts itself. We have the poignant note of real grief in the passage : 'But O ! the heavy change now thou art gone . . . . ' ; the note of meditative despondency in 'Alas, what boots it with incessant care . . . . ' ; of righteous indignation that threatens to become savage in the speech of St. Peter, and the profound Peace of the last. address to the 'woeful' shepherds.

The unique combination of classical and Puritan culture, which appears so natural in Milton's poetry, is present here also. 'Not only does he try to combine classical and Christian ideas, but even his austere Puritan faith is expressed in a passage that stands dangerously close to a dazzling inventory of 'vernal flowers'. It is true that we miss the sensuousness of *Comus*. But the poet can never forget what he has learnt from the great poets of the Renaissance—especially Spenser. It is really noteworthy that the flower-passage in *Lycidas* has its prototype in *The Shepherd's Calendar*. Milton's imagination weaves for him a pattern in which Jove and Christ, the Angels and the Muses, Cam and St. Peter, all find a place. It is aflame whenever he is not meditating,—and we have in *Lycidas* both reflective and highly imaginative passages. Milton rivals the great Romantic poets with the wonderful sweep of his imagination in one or two places—in

> "Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
> Where the great Vision of the guarded mount
> Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold,"

and in the description of the ship—

> "It was that fated and perfidious bark,
> Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
> That sunk so low that sacred head of thine."

His imagery is, as in *Comus*, supremely felicitous. An unforgettable image depicts the calm sea in which the ship sank:

"The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters played."

Equally pictorial is the line—

"While the still morn went out with sandals grey. . . ."

In the death of Lycidas, the shepherds have suffered a great loss ; it is—

"As killing as the canker to the rose
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear
When first the white-thorn blows. . . ."

Mr. Tillyard, in a beautiful analysis of some aspects of the poem observes that the very structure of the poem is full of meaning. It has what he chooses to call plotobliquity—i.e., the plot *suggests* many significant details. The arrangement of the different sections of the poem is such that the poet can trust them to imply many things. The most important suggestion is that the poet has a complete command over his own emotions—he has a sense of 'power'. It has already been remarked that the poem is a succession of different moods. The first two sections express grief, diffidence, disappointment and indignation : but on their heels we have the quiet, colourful description of the flowers, and the reassuring meditation on Christian glory that brings eternal Peace. The climax is reached in the speech of St. Peter ; and the poet begins to recover his calm, his perfect equanimity, with the line—

'Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past. . . .'

The conflict in the poet's mind is thus resolved, and the obstinate questionings have received a reply that brings solace. Mr. Tillyard believes that the plot suggests many things besides a sense of power. "The sudden plunge from bitter actuality to Arcadia, from contemporary politics to utter escape, reveals a mind both vastly capacious and exqusitely

aware of different states of feeling. But out of the whole poem, not implied by the plot but as it were vouched for by the sense of greatness created by the plot, emerges one of the supreme commonplaces. The poem ends with the poet's resolution to go on with his proper work."

Lastly, it may be noted that the style of *Lycidas* is exalted and stately, with memorable phrases that combine music with meaning :

(i) Hath not left his peer.
(ii) Without the meed of some melodious tear
(iii) To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
(iv) Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair
(v) Ready to smite once, and smite no more,

the often-quoted, and more often misquoted, last line—

"Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new."

Lycidas reveals sincere feeling coupled with great and deliberate art. The art has been noticed often enough—for instance, by Dr. Johnson ! It should not, however, blind us to the real emotion of the poet, even if it is not caused by the death of King. Though *Lycidas* may not be a great elegy, it is certainly great poetry. The pastoral tradition introduced certain obvious limitations : so did the poet's own personality. And even when we consider *Lycidas* as an elegy, we cannot forget the wise observation of Mr. Bailey—"It is not the actual experience of sorrow that the elegiac poet needs ; but the power of heart and imagination to conceive it and the power of language to give it fit expression."

11. Renaissance Influence in Lycidas: Milton's poetry cannot be explained without the Renaissance and the Reformation. They cross, blend and separate—and even one opposes itself to the other in his poetry ; yet they make Milton and his poetry what they are. If only the influences of the Renaissance had been working in him, he might have been like, though by far superior to, one of his contemporaries—he might have been one of the supremely gifted Cavalier lyrists, as we may presume from his production of *L'Allegro*,

or he might have become a greater Crashaw or Vaughan, if he had been an Anglican. Apart from his personal gifts which make the uniqueness of his poetry, the two influences —the Renaissance and the Reformation—are important in shaping his genius. They change their proportions in his poetry—the Renaissance is more predominant in his earlier poems, while Puritanism, the final issue of the Reformation, is more predominant in his later poems. Milton assimilated the culture of the Renaissance, and if he was the poet of beauty—the beauty of the Greek myth, art and letters—it was because he was saturated with the spirit of the Renaissance. A passionate worship of beauty was a part of the Renaissance creed and Milton's love of beauty was partly spiritual, and not entirely physical—he was attracted, as every Renaissance poet was, by the beauty of Greek mythology, but instead of being content with taking it as it is, he re-interpreted it or read it as a series of symbols. Of his passionate love of beauty Milton writes : "Whatever the Deity may have bestowed upon me in other respects, He has certainly inspired me, if any ever were inspired, with a passion for the good and the beautiful. Nor did Ceres, according to the fable, ever seek her daughter Proserpine with such unceasing solicitude *as I have sought this idea of the beautiful in all the forms and appearances of things*, for many are the shapes of things divine. *Day* and *night* I am wont to continue my search." Not even Keats, to whom "a thing of beauty" was "a joy for ever," could have written of his own devotion to beauty more fervently. We have to remember that it was with this intense love of the beautiful "in all forms and appearances of things," that Milton, the great Puritan poet of England, with home presently "the ways of God to men" were to be the primary concern, actually set out on his career.

But how is it that Milton soon finds the Renaissance ideal coming into clash with his mission as a poet ? In *Paradise Lost* he sets out to justify the ways of God to men. The same theme too reappears in *Samson Agonistes*. Milton must have seen with pain how the high promise of the Renaissance faded away, and how the enthusiasm it had kindled for beauty and culture, gradually degenerated into sensuality and

intellectual Bohemianism. With his serious temper and outlook on life, he could no longer be in sympathy with the Renaissance ideal, which had become a worship of the body and the senses ; love of knowledge and love of beauty still remained the central creed of the Renaissance, but they were applied to temporal and unworthy ends. It is significant, therefore, that Milton makes Belial, one of the followers of Satan, the mouth piece of the of Renaissance in the second book of *Paradise Lost* :

> for who would lose,
> Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
> Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
> To perish rather, swallow'd up and lost
> In the wide womb of uncreated night,
> Devoid of sense and motion ?

Milton could not have committed himself to this creed, for his moral and spiritual being was a greater concern to him than his intellectual being. Yet he prized Renaissance culture—love of knowledge and love of beauty. The beauty of the Greek myth still held him entranced, though he was discovering a symbolical use of it ; the literary forms that were popularised by the Renaissance, were still in favour with Milton. He had written a pastoral (*Lycidas*) ; he was to write in future an epic (*Paradise Lost*) and a classical tragedy (*Samson Agonistes*). Though he grew into a militant Puritan, he could not discard Renaissance culture and influence ; it had become a part of his intellectual being. The fact is that his love of knowledge and his love of beauty came to be tempered by his moral and spiritual propensities.

The Renaissance has been described as a rebirth of learning, the rediscovery of the Greek world of art and letters. It broadly applies to the movement and period of transition between the mediaeval and modern worlds. It began with Petrarch and Italian humanists in the fourteenth century, and was immensely stimulated by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, resulting in the dissemination of Greek scholarship and Byzantine art, the invention of printing about the same time,

and the discovery of America in 1492. In England this revival first manifested itself in the early years of the sixteenth century. The Renaissance really meant an emancipation of the human spirit from the shackles of mediaeval monasticism, brooding over sins of the flesh, and other-worldliness. It began as an intellectual quest and adventure, while there was an immense broadening of the horizons, intellectual and material, by the acceptance of the Copernican theory and discovery of the New World.

The direct bearing that the Renaissance had upon literature was its regeneration by the models of classical scholarship. It started with various literary experiments—sonnets, pastorals, odes, even verses in original classical metres (which were not a success), and in the exploitation of classical mythology. Italy was the home of the Renaissance, and Italian influence operated strongly in the early years of the Elizabethan poetry. Spenser and Sidney were the exponents of Italian tradition and culture. Now Milton was a true child of the Renaissance, even in his later poems, *Paradise Last*, *Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes*, he could not wholly rid himself of Renaissance culture and tradition, however aggressive his moral and spiritual earnestness (his Hebraism as distinguished from his Hellenism) became. His early poems are strongly coloured by the Renaissance ; if he does not actually "sport with Amaryllis in the shade," he dallies with Greek deities, nymphs, the frolic wind, Zephyr, and Aurora a maying and their amours as well as those of Vesta and Saturn, no matter if daughter and father, for "in Saturn's reign such mixture was not held a stain." The whole world of Greek myths with their undimmed beauty, unsophisticated suggestions and human interest is pictured for us by Milton in his early poems.

Even, if in *Lycidas*, Milton's Puritan bias is well pronounced, he has not been able to discard the service of classical mythology and pastoral machinery and framework, which are all the gifts of the Renaissance. Therefore in *Lycidas*, Renaissance tradition and culture are interwoven with distinctly Puritan thought. The poem is strongly weighted with Renaissance culture. Hudson writes : "Milton's

progressive Puritanism did not involve the repudiation of the classic culture in which he was bred. If at the age of thirty nothing of the Renaissance was left to him but its learning and its art, we must never forget that at least these were left. Had they not been left, "Paradise Lost" would have been an impossibility. The great fact upon which we have to fix our attention is that Milton became a Puritan without ceasing to be a humanist ; only from this time onward, the art and learning of the Renaissance were not to be cultivated for their own sakes ; they were to be employed in the service of those religious and moral truths which had not become the dominant factors in his life."

12. Blending of Classical imagery and Christian Theology: Connected as *Lycidas* is with the Renaissance tradition and practice, there is, in it, to a modern mind, an incongruous mingling of classical imagery and Christian theology. In the first flush of the Renaissance, the European minds were captured and fascinated by the magic of ancient classics. It was an El Dorado to them. Poets and dramatists were only too eager to absorb, no matter if they could ill digest, this ancient learning and particularly the classical mythology, embodying the living poetry of the race, and to harness them to their services as best they could. Even Milton, with his rationalistic mind and growing Puritan bias, could not resist the fascination. The Renaissance has been described as a rebirth of learning ; interpreted as it was through the native tongues and cultures of Europe, it was rather a rediscovery of the beauty and clarity of the Greek mind. The readers of *Lycidas* are less repelled by the incongruity of the mixture, but are more delighted by the magic of classical names, and their creation and adaptation of classical mythology. Milton himself Puritan or no Puritan, was intoxicated by the marvels of Greek culture, by the human values of Greek deities, by the strong poetical characters of Greek myths. The fact is that Milton, in spite of his growing Hebraic zeal, was the poet, above all his contemporaries, to lay Greek culture and Greek mythology most under contribution.

Following the tradition of his classical masters he opens with an invocation of the "Sisters of the sacred well." This,

in one who is to be a poet of militant Puritanism, is rather disconcerting to a reader, who is soon persuaded to take this incongruity as a matter of course as he proceeds through the poem. So, according to the practice, it is not surprising that "rough satyrs," and "fauns with cloven heel" should be associated with Lycidas. Why, the name Lycidas itself is pagan, and the strangest of things is that it should be given to one who was going to take holy orders! The incongruity does not strike Milton, nor could it have struck his contemporaries. Milton follows here the established tradition of his age. The classical nymphs are associated with the Druids; Phoebus, Comus and St. Peter are all brought in. How can a serious Christian poet like Milton have anything to do with Phoebus? As a poet Milton seems to owe his allegiance more to Phoebus than to the spirit of God; or perhaps he unconsciously makes Phoebus and the spirit of God one, and perhaps he thinks of his Christian God when he speaks of the "all-judging Jove." The Christian poets of the age (to salve their conscience) applied Greek myths as symbols. The pastoral elegy can but achieve its effect by a process of symbolisation. Now if the whole thing is no more than a symbol—one shepherd mourning his dead companion; woods and caves, and their echoes joining him in his grief; the nymphs and the sea-god being all interested in the dead, and so on—there seems to be no incongruity. Camus, the personification of Cambridge, is certainly a symbol and so St. Peter is the symbol of the Christian Church.

Milton conceives Lycidas as one who would have proved a true son of the church, and St. Peter as a mourner is not out of place. Some object to St. Peter's denunciation, which, they say, is out of place. Now if it is to be shown that Lycidas would have proved a worthy son of the church, the corruptions of the elergy must be exposed or denounced. However, if it is a digression, Milton soon returns to his theme, which develops through strictly pastoral imagery and convention. There is the conventionalized landscape with a cluster of names of flowers, a familiar feature in other pastoral poets too.

Bring the rather primrose that forsaken dies.
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet . . . .

If we accept the pastoral convention, so much in vogue in those days, there seems to be no reason why it should not be further developed in the direction of symbolism, as by the blending of classical imagery and Christian theory. We may well describe it as a new development of pastoralism in Spenser and Milton.

13. Puritan Influence in Lycidas: "Puritan" is the name primarily applied in the sixteenth century to those advanced Protestants among the clergy who wished to purge the Church of England of what they regarded as superstitious and corrupt observances retained after the severance from Rome. From the clergy it spread to their supporters among the laity, and then was applied more particularly to the sectaries who stood apart from the church altogether. Of Puritanism in its best signification, Milton, Cromwell, and John Bunyan are the supreme types. The harshness of many of the Puritan doctrines caused a severe reaction, and after the Stuart Restoration in 1660 the name of Puritan was held up to derision by such satirists as Butler. The Puritans who had been gaining power slowly in the reign of Elizabeth knew how to manage them, as she had sometimes to count on their support against the Roman Catholics, who were the agents of foreign powers, and were now and then involved in conspiracy against the throne. But James I favoured the Roman Catholics, and the Puritans who were already becoming influential in society by reason of their wealth, acquired in trade and commerce, found their lot rather hard, and in the reign of Charles I, who ruled as an absolute monarch, the Puritans became the most vocal political party, and carried on a fight for both civil and religious freedom—and in fact when *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* were written, a crisis did not seem to be far distant.

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso* are both descriptive poems. In these poems two types are presented—a cheerful man and

a contemplative man. It is easy to see with whom Milton identifies himself. In *L'Allegro* there is no trace of Puritanism ; it is a picture of traditional 'merry England.'

In *L'Allegro* Milton reflects the truly Cavalier (anti-Puritan) spirit in his preference for tournaments, for "mask, and antique pageantry," for "Jonson's learned sock," and Shakespeare's native woodnotes wild." We may well think that Milton has not yet made up his mind whether he should line up with the Cavaliers or Puritans.

In *Il Penseroso* is certainly reflected a serious turn of mind, disposed to study and meditate the deeper things of spirit till past midnight. And as in *L'Allegro* he likes to enjoy the comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare, so in *Il Penseroso* he likes to enjoy ancient Greek tragedies, and tales of adventure and chivalry. Nor does it seem that he is turning away from the Church of England. He loves "to walk the studious cloister's pale," and listen to

> The pealing organ blow
> To the full voic'd quire below,
> In service high, and anthems clear.

He is speaking here of service in a cathedral. The poet of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is not a Puritan, but in the latter poem there is evidence of his deepening seriousness.

In *Comus* the scales begin to turn definitely in favour of Puritanism. In the revels of Comus we may believe that Milton represents the profligacy of Charles I's court. It is true that if we read *Comus* without any reference to the times it will appear that Milton simply celebrates the triumph of virtue, and we cannot discover in it anything Puritanical.

But there can be little doubt that Milton represents, in *Comus*, the reaction of a section of people—the sober minded—against the licence of the court. There seems to be a close parallel between what we see in *Comus* and the court of Charles I.

In *Lycidas*, Milton throws off the disguise of allegory, and comes out in the open, the pastoral imagery being but

a thin veil. His conviction how true religion—religion in its non-ritual and non-ceremonial form, as the Puritans understood it—was being debased and deadened by Laud's innovations, burned fiercely in him, and could not but break out in that passage on the corrupt church and place-hunters. And the divine judgment that Milton predicts ('that two-handed engine at the door') has been supposed by some to have been literally fulfilled. R.C. Browne writes: "Again, the 'wakes' had in 1633 been maintained by Laud against the remonstrance of the judges, and in the promulgation of the 'Book of Sports' the archibshop had shown that his zeal for ceremonies did not prevent his attempting what was regarded as a deliberate desecration of a divinely appointed institution. Even the staunch royalist Fuller evidently wished that the luckless proclamation had been laid aside by Charles as by James, and *inclined to the popular belief that the civil battles (notably Edgehill) fought on a Sunday were judgments specially connected with this act of the King's government.* The divines who counselled it did so in the hope that the pastimes enjoined would hinder the people from talking critically of matters of Church and State, and from resorting to conventicles. They took for granted that the church .was established in fact as well as in name, *and willingly followed the prevalent fashion of maintaining it by taking good care of themselves, by scrambling at the 'shearers' feast' for rich deaneries and bishoprics, for places in council and in the court of High Commission.*"

Now in *Lycidas* there is the same picture of the church in words and images that glow with the poet's indignation. He does not spare the hirelings of the church, who enter the profession "for their bellies' sake," and crowd out true teachers. Milton uses the pastoral imagery—

That scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs—.

but it hardly conceals his passionate indignation—

What recks it then? What need they? They are sheep! They neglect their charge:

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.

In any case Milton makes the cause his own, is anxious to purge the church of these hirelings and restore the pristine simplicity as against Laudian splendour of ceremony, which smacks of Romanism. In *Lycidas* Milton definitely identifies himself with the Puritan party.

14. Digressions in Lycidas—and how far justifiable: *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy, but Milton more than once deviates from the spirit of the pastoral elegy. Milton does not strictly confine himself to lament for Edward King, nor to purely pastoral convention and tradition. He opens the poem in the right key by addressing the lanrels and myrtles brown, etc., and expresses his diffidence in writing poetry again so soon after *Comus*, particularly because he does not consider his poetic powers ripe enough, but he has to suspend his resolution because of the death of his friend.

Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due.

It serves the purpose of introduction. Then he invokes the sisters of the sacred well, and at once launches into the theme of the poem. Through pastoral convention and imagery, he describes his association with his friend, and their common task. There is the note of grief in the verse beginning,

But O, the heavy change, now thou art gone !

The woods aad desert caves, and all their echoes mourn him. In accordance with the pastoral tradition, Milton associates Nature (be it noted, conventionalized Nature) with himself in mourning. Then very artistically Milton weaves local references into the pastoral imagery :

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas ?
For neither were ye playing on the steep,
Where your old bards, the famous Druids lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.

It is all in strict accordance with the spirit and form of a pastoral elegy.

Now the first digression occurs in lines 64-85. In these lines he speaks of the poet's task and mission, glances at the trifling spirit and wantonness of contemporary poetry. Then he speaks of fame—fame which is not a thing of the earth—to which a true poet aspires, and which impels him "to scorn delights, and live laborious days ;" and further expands the idea in the lines that follow.

Can this digression be defended ? Has it anything to do with the theme of the poem ? Firstly, it will be seen that it naturally arises out of the context. In line 50 Milton addresses the Nymphs, guarding the sea-coast, who could not protect Edward King; then he recalls the classical example of the Muse, being unable to save Orpheus,

> When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
> His gory visage down the stream was sent,
> Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore !

Then naturally the thought arises whether it is worth while to "meditate the thankless Muse", and from this follows the reference to contemporary poetry, and to that descant on fame. As we read through the poem, we are not conscious of any incongruity of thought. It is true that Milton seems to elaborate the theme of fame a little too much but it does not seem to be unnecessarily dragged in into the poem. Secondly, if it interrupts the flow of grief, it ought to be welcomed as a relief. In constructing the poem Milton, who is a true artist in the matter of construction, has the sense of the effect of light and shade in a picture. If the poem had been entirely concerned with the poet's grief, and nothing else, the poem would have been boring. If we read the poem carefully, we will observe that there is a wave of emotion, which keeps the poem so fresh and intelligible. A more striking effect has been obtained by resuming the lament, and beginning a new phase after a pause or diversion, while the continuity of the theme is not seriously disturbed. Now when Milton resumes the lament after the

digression the poet's task and fame, he pays delicate compliments to Theocritus and Virgil, and returns to the pastoral note.

> O fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood,
> Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds.

Milton himself is not unaware of the digression he has been tempted into, for he writes:

> That strain I heard was of a higher mood:
> But now my oat proceeds.

We have already pointed out that it naturally arises from the trend of the thought in the poem. Thirdly, we value it as a piece of self-revelation—Milton's conviction of the serious avocation and sacred mission of a poet. This self-revelation makes the poem significant, for the artificial form of the poem—its pastoralism and mythological allusions—is little to the taste of modern reader.

Camus, the local spirit of Cambridge, is all in place. Such local touches give an additional interest to the poem. But "the pilot of the Galilean lake," with his severe denunciation of the corrupt church, seems to be quite out of place in a pastoral elegy. Milton's fierce polemical spirit, which is later to plunge him into political controversies, first breaks out here. In the opinion of many critics the whole passage (109–131) strikes a jarring note—and is a positive blemish in the poem. It expresses for the first time Milton's militant Puritanism. Now the question is whether a passage like this is justifiable in a pastoral elegy. One thing ought to be clearly borne in mind. *Lycidas* interests a modern reader, not because of its pastoral form, or because of its expression of grief, but because of the poet's self-revelation in it. In *Lycidas*, Milton gives expression to his poetical aims and purposes, and to his religious convictions. It might not please many readers that he should have taken himself so seriously. But does Milton not voice the spirit of reaction against the licence of the court (as in *Camus* and against the tendency to the revival of Papacy in the church ? We might well think that Milton had to face a crisis in his moral and spiritual being. The poet of *L' Allegro* should

have naturally gone with the cavaliers. But he saw that his contemporay poets were triflers in verse, that the courtiers were a besotted lot, that the ministers of religion were mere self-seekers. Naturally he turned away in disgust from them, and sought life of rigid self-discipline. These intimate revelations in *Lycidas* we particularly value. In *Lycidas* we can trace Milton's reaction against the debauchery of the court and the paganism of the church. Secondly, the passage, however it may serve Milton's purpose, has a link with the whole poem. It is not in fact foisted on. Edward King was going to take orders. If Edward King had lived, he would have become a worthy son of the Church. Therefore, Milton brings in the pilot of the Galilean Lake (St. Peter) to mourn Edward King, and St. Peter must contrast him with those who are self-seekers, and take little spiritual care of their charge. Then the passage gives Milton an occasion to denounce the corrupt church and predict the punishment that is to follow. The fierce indignation breathing in this passage certainly runs counter to the whole spirit and atmosphere of a pastoral poem. But necessity must excuse it. In reviewing the career of Edward King, Milton has to mention the fact that he was going to enter the church, and then the occasion arises to draw the picture of the corrupt church and the place-hunters.

> Of other care they little reck'ning make,
> Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast.

Of course this passage is less defensible than the other one. The alien passion that suddenly breaks in upon the quiet tenor of grief, surprises and startles many readers, and the "two-handed engine" haunts the mind with unknown terror. But, as we have pointed out, there is wave after wave of emotion, which is a very marked feature of the poem. In this passage there is just the pitch of emotion, and then serving the purpose of contrast or relief the poet's emotion returns to its norm—and there is the picture of valleys, flower-bedecked,

> Where the mild whispers use
> Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
> On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks.

The digressions may not be in keeping with the spirit of the poem, but they can be easily defended on artistic grounds. They vary and relieve the tone of grief ; they serve the purpose of contrast ; they tend to raise and lower the pitch of emotion ; they are interesting as fragments of autobiography.

15. Relation of Lycidas to Milton's earlier and later poems : It has been pointed out that *Lycidas* is in the direct line of Italianate tradition (which was introduced by Spenser). But there is a discordant note in it—Milton's attack upon the corrupt clergy of his day. Does he not make pastoral elegy the vehicle of propaganda and preaching ? This is contrary to the tradition of classical art and culture. Now the new spirit revealed in *Lycidas*—the prophet-like wrath and zeal in the cause of Puritanism—links the poem with what is coming—the religious and political controversies through which the poet plodded on for eleven years, and then the belated redeeming of his promise in the epic, *Paradise Lost*, and its sequel, *Paradise Regained*, to be concluded by the dying cadence of *Samson Agonistes*—an allegory of his personal hopes and aspirations, and of the defeat of his life's purpose. *Lycidas* does not stand isolated in his poetic development. It is equally linked up with his earlier poems, *L' Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Arcades and Camus*. The decorative poetic fancy which lights up the earlier poems later gives way to a seriousness of purpose, to a more strenuous devotion to poetic art and ideal. to the organisation of life and conduct on a stricter religious basis, but that light of fancy is not extinguished either in *Camus* or in *Lycidas*. The lovely Greek myths have still a strong hold on his imagination ; the ideal landscape, pastoral or otherwise, still appeals to his poetic susceptibility ; in short, the tender strains of lamentation in *Lycidas*—its Doric sweetness, as many critics point out,—its pastoral imagery, put it closer to *L' Allegro*, *Il Penseroso* and *Arcades* than to *Paradise Lost*. The poem looks backward and forward—it looks backward in its decorative fancy, in its tilting melody, in its pastoral landscape and imagery, and it looks forward in the deep-toned, solemn melody of the passage of denunciation.

"*Lycidas* gathers up all the iridescent colour and varied music of Milton's youthful verse, indeed, of the whole

Spenserian school; and at the same time, by virtue of the moral passion which burns in it, it looks forward to the period of public combat into which the poet was about to plunge."— (*Moody and Lovett*)

16. Style of Lycidas :

Melody :

That mighty orb of song
The divine Milton—(*Wordsworth*.)

We may dislike the pastoral convention of the poem, we may be handicapped by the classical allusions, and repelled by Milton's polemical spirit, so pointedly expressed in the poem, but we are held enthralled by the soaring, concatenated melody of the poem. The penetrating music, achieved by such diverse means, but particularly by allocation of sounds, vowel and consonantal, and varied in response to the ebb and tide of emotion by the shifting of the caesura, or by the shortening or lengthening of a line—an effect which can hardly be analysed or defined—keeps the poem still living. *Lycidas* is but a more strenuous development of the style and music of *L' Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Milton makes an unconscious comment on his verse-melody when he writes in *L' Allegro* of :

Notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out.

The two poems are in octosyllabic measure, with the last foot running short. While other poets make of octosyllables a jog-trot verse, Milton evolves out of them a music not altogether gay and wanton, but rather entrancing—at least there is the feeling that here is a new world of music, and skill in combination of melodious sounds. What Saintsbury writes of Milton's *Ode on the Nativity*, may not inappropriately describe the sensation of a reader of these two poems. 'Both in the stanza-prelude, and still more when the actually

lyric part begins, the note to ears that can hear is as new as it is exquisite. Even Spenser had not written like it, even Spenser had not written anything more individual and more delightful in word-music ; while if we compare it with what had been done or could be done by the best poets then alive.—Drayton, Chapman, Jonson, Donne, Wither, the Fletchers, etc—we shall find a note of witchery which only Donne could have surpassed, while the soft harmony of the motion is altogether different from Donne's less mellifluous touch."—*L' Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are of course written in a different metre—a metre which could not have yielded such marvellous results except in the hands of Milton, but we are at once thrilled by his spontaneous gift of melody—by his nice ear for the musical value of sounds, by his skill in the redistribution of them, and the assemblage of the most harmonious of these sounds.

Then in *Comus* the music of verse is woven into a more complex unit, anticipating the later verse-paragraph of *Paradise Lost*. The very looseness of the verse-structure by reason of extra-metrical syllables, contributes to "linked sweetness long drawn out." The blank verse of *Paradise Lost* is distinguished by majesty ; the blank verse of *Comus*, by sweetness. But *Comus*, whatever the value of the story or its moral teaching, is a further amplification of Milton's peculiar verse-melody, and holds all the promise of the more closely-knit, orchestrated blank verse of *Paradise Lost*—a very diapason in itself. In this connection it should be remembered that Milton took up blank verse when it was disintegrating in the later Elizabethan dramatists, and it is surprising that Milton could have extracted such melody out of this, loose, inorganic type of blank verse. Sir Henry Wotton speaks of "a certain Doric delicacy" in his songs and odes, and plainly confesses to have seen nothing to parallel it in the English langugae. Sir Henry Wotton is evidently thinking of the lyrics in *Comus*. In these lyrics Milton recaptures the earlier note of *L'Allegro*.

In *Lycidas* Milton tries the odic measure in lines of irregular length. And the arrangement of lines, varying from five feet to four or three feet, seems to be the most fitting

vehicle of the poet's emotion, with its rise and fall, with its pause and its sweeping forward, with its meditative tone of grief and glowing indignation. The poem expresses varying phases by shortening or lengthening the line. The verse of *Lycidas* shows a greater advance in flexibility richness, and penetrating sweetness.

Diction : Milton's diction is generally Latinised, that is to say, there is a greater proportion of Latin words than English words in his verse ; sometimes he even follows the Latin construction, and uses a word in its original Latin sense. In the disposition of adjectives, Milton has his own practice of putting one before and another after the substantive ; in this matter he seems to follow rather the rhythm of emotion. A further characteristic is the use of curtailed participles ; we find this too in Shakespeare as well as interchangebility of parts of speech. All these characteristics are fully displayed in the diction of *Paradise Lost*. Though Milton is attracted by sonorous Latin words. in *Lycidas*, there is a remarkable paucity of Latin words. The metrical skill, shown in the verse of *Lycidas*, with adjustment of pauses and cadences, is quite marvellous. The diction is not strictly Miltonic ; the long drawn out music is an unmistakable a prelude to the rolling, reverberating organ note of *Paradise Lost*. The difference between the diction of *Lycidas* and that of *Paradise Lost* is noteworthy. The diction of *Lycidas*, while it has the stamp of Milton's genius and personality, is more affiliated to the Elizabethan diction, fluid and ornate, and not mannered and stereotyped as it later becomes in *Paradise Lost*. In *Lycidas* there is hardly any evidence of Latin construction ; there are only two instances of Latin words used in their radical sense ("*meditate* the thankless *Muse*," "my dearest *pledge*") ; there are a few instances of Miltonic inversion of adjectives ("*forc'd* fingers *rude*," "*sad* occasion *dear*," "*blest* kingdoms *meek*").

Now Milton as an artist in words and verbal melody, he is very careful in his choice of words and allocation of sounds. Conciseness and compression are the marked qualities of his poetic style : Every word in Milton's verse

has its value in meaning and sound, and demands the closest attention of the reader. As an early critic of Milton remarks : "A reader of Milton must be always upon duty; he is surrounded with sense, it rises in every line, every word is to the purpose. There are not lazy intervals; all has been considered, and demands and merits observation. Even in the best writers you sometimes find words and sentences which hang on so loosely, you may blow them off. Milton's are all substance and weight; fewer would not have served his turn, and more would have been superfluous. His silence has the same effect, not only that he leaves work for the imagination, when he has entertained it and furnished it with noble materials; but he expresses himself so concisely, employs words so sparingly, that whoever will possess his ideas must dig for them, and oftentimes, pretty far below the surface." From *Lycidas* we may give the following example of condensation and pregnancy of meaning :

> Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,
> Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
> Where the great vision of the guarded mount
> Looks toward Namancos, and Bayonas hold.

What far-off association, what wide-circling suggestions, what a large volume of meaning are packed into these few lines ! Firstly, we notice 'moist vows' and it is a very pregnant phrase which means tears due to the dead as a gift of the mourner, 'The fable of Bellerus' stirs some old classical association—Belerium, which was the name of Land's End in Roman times. Next, the great vision of the guarded mount' is an epitome of facts—the appearance of St. Michael, in a vision to an anchorite on Mount St. Michael whence St. Michael is supposed still to stand on the summit of the Mount. Then with these allusions Milton weaves two geographical names—Namancos and Bayona—both having a sound of romance.

Next we may notice the felicity of his adjectives and epithets. The best test of their excellences is that they cannot be changed without affecting the sense and rhythm of the line. We may choose any lines :

He must not float upon his wat'ry bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind
Without the meed of some melodious tear.

Each of the epithets—*wat'ry parching, melodious* is happily chosen; we cannot think of a better substitute for any. Fur ther, we see how appropriate each word is, not only in itself, but in relation to other words—'float' goes very well with 'wat'ry bier,' 'welter,' with 'parching wind,' and 'meed', with 'melodious tear.' Then all the wealth of meaning and suggestion is put into a very melodious verse. We easily see how the liquild sounds—*l,m,n,r* predominate in the lines. Note also the alliteration in *t* in the first line, in *w* in the second line, in *m* in the third line.

Grand Style—illastrated in Lycidas: "For myself, I should want, outside of Dante and Shakespeare and Æschylus and Lucretius, no better example of the grand style in poetry than *Lycidas* itself. For variety of grandeur, I do not think you can find any passage of equal length in the *Paradise* to match it.........Even the two famous outbursts of sectarianism —to which I have the strongest personal objection as a matter of history and opinion, and which some of the staunchest of Milton's admirers have admitted to be an error of taste and art—seem to me, for all that, not lose grandeur of form. And why? Because the supremacy of expression and phrase and verse remains the discord and the declension, even to those who find them such, are in the sentiment only.

.........In one of the very grandest passages of all, one of the most perfect phrases in English poetry—

Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold—

we know, for instance, that he had at first written 'Corineus, a name just as good in itself as 'Bellerus,' well known to most of his probable readers in the fables of the chroniclers who had monopoly of the history of England, but, as it

happens, concerting, symphonizing, less well with the rest of the passage in sound. So he justly coined 'Bellerus' from 'Belerium,' and this gave him an extra *l* 'for love and for euphony' as a christening gift.........' ... It may well serve as a text for a few words on that mighty engine of grandeur of style in the use of which no one has ever surpassed Milton —the employment of proper names. No device of his that touches style is more celebrated; none, perhaps, has been more violently disliked by those who cannot taste him. His conscious reasons for adopting it may be variously guessed at. There were the concurrent examples of the ancients whom he revered and the medieval writers whom he really loved—for there never was, in all literature, such a blend of Classic and Romantic as Milton's. There was the foible of the age—and not a bad foible either—for the putting in evidence of learning—for giving, as it were, key and catch words which brother-students might recognize, and which awake in them, as in himself, pleasant trains of association and remembrance. There was the delight in a wide survey of times and countries, of looking back to the famous men, our fathers that were before us—of knitting his own literature of Spenser and Ariosto, of Dante and Petrarch, of all the great poets and prosemen of ancient times. But the master inducement must have been really, whatever it was consciously, the power and beauty of the words themselves—the combination of attractive strangeness, freedom from vulgarity, and intrinsic harmony..... .... And so he scatters the light and colour and music of these names all over his verse—seeming to grow fonder and fonder of the practice as he grows older, from the consummate but not lavish examples of it in *Lycidas* itself down to the positive revels of nomenclature—geographical, mythological, romantic—which are to be found in *Paradise Regained*............. ......His 'common vocabulary'—a 'common' which is made so uncommon—is as grand as his 'proper', and the grandeur is by no means always achieved by unusual diction in individual words, though it sometimes is......—His selection of words and his arrangement of them are simply consummate ... .Let us open—it cannot be open too often—our *Lycidas* yet once more. It is true that there is such a blaze

of the grand style all trough it that it is difficult to isolate any particular ray : or rather to select any particular ray for isolation and analysis. But the diffculty only arises from their number and the unbroken succession of them. Take almost the earliest—that of the second line. He wants to tell us that myrtle withers and ivy is eve-green. It is not all-important, but it is connected with the theme and is not a mere decorative addition; it is worthy of the grand style, and it has it.

Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,

summons to its mere contrast of vowel sound and arrangement of rhythm. Look down a few lines and find the phrases which tip each line for four running—'*lofty* rhyme', '*watery* bier', '*parching* wind',*melodious* tear'. 'Oh,' says the objector, 'anybody can pile on adjectives.' Yes; can anyone pile on these adjectives? In a certain other school the '*gradus* epithet' is a well-known ornamental addition. You can often, if not most often, take it away without spoiling the sense, or substitute half a dczen others without much affecting that sense. Here you cannot. 'Lofty' keys on directly and almost inevitably to 'build' which has come before ; 'watery' is necessary to the occasion, 'parching' independent of its value as sound is wanted as a contrast to 'watery' and 'melodious tear' is hardly a mere epithet at all. It expresses tears with melody—the melody of lament and regret. This is how the grand style uses epithets : and how the *grndus* does not suggest their use.

Again, alliteration, it sometimes has been held, is a childish thing—perhaps worse—a foolish and tawdry bedizenment. Is it? Try, for instance, such a phrase as—

The swart star sparely looks.

Try it without alliteration—

The fierce star rarely looks.

Try it with the adverb which Milton himself once thought of substituting—'stintly'; try it with anything but this cunning variation of the same 's' alliteration with a different subsidiary consonant and the almost more cunning selection of

the different values of the same vowel. Your ear, if you happen to possess one, will tell you of the heavy change.

Try 'the *embattled* mount' (an excellent phrase itself) for 'the guarded mount' in the passage cited above,

Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore

(it is not needed in sense) from the verse paragraph to which it belongs and see what change that does. Roll over on the palate of your mind such expressions as '*Clear* Spirit,' *Broad* rumour.' Weigh, measure, adjust to each other, and consider the adjustment of such words as the constitutents of the line—

To scorn delights and live laborious days.

You will begin, I suspect, to think more nobly of the Doinysian 'beautiful letters' than to hold them the mere 'rhetoricians' tools,' which they have often been considered: and you will estimate them at their due worth as constituents in their turn of the grand style. And if contrast is wanted, take what some, I believe, have considered an exquisitely pathetic passage—what is truly and genuinely pathetic in substance—from a poet whom Mr. Arnold, while exalting above all but the first two of our poets, pronounced to have him no 'style at all':

The wretched parents all that night
Went shouting far and wide,
But there was neither sound nor sight,
To serve them for a guide.

As pathetic as you like in substance: perhaps (it is no matter, but it may be mentioned) expressing a more genuine, certainly a deeper, sorrow than that of Milton for King. But of the grand style—intentionally nothing if you please, but nothing"—*Saintsbury*.

17. Criticism of the Poem : *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy on the model of Bion's *Lament for Adonis* or Moschus' *Lament for Bion.* Both were Greek poets ; Bion lived in

Sicily, and Moschus in Syracuse. The pastoral elegy, such as originated with Bion and Moschus, became a conventional type of poetry when it began to be imitated at the time of the Renaissance. The artificialities of the poem will be obnoxious to a modern reader. The pastoral convention makes Milton a shepherd, mourning his dead companion, a shephered too.

> For we were nursed upon the self-same hill.
> Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill;
> Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
> Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,
> We drove a-field, and both together heard
> What time the grey-fly winds her sultry horn,
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
> Oft till the star that rose at evening bright
> Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.

We may well ask whether the poet is not toying with the sentiment of grief when he lets his fancy embroider the theme thus. But we ought to remember that it was quite according to the taste of the age. Milton's own contemporaries appreciated this tender and graceful play of fancy, which transmuted sorrow into a pensive thought.

Next the question is whether we catch the true note of grief in such a poem. It is pointed out by some critics that Milton could not have had much intimacy with Edward King. The grief expressed must, therefore, be feigned. In an elegy, grief is toned down, poignant emotion is dissolved into a tender sentiment, into a sad, pensive recollection of what is no more. Now about *Lycidas*, there can be no question of the sincerity of Milton's feeling. Milton does not merely follow the convention. When Spenser wrote *Astrophel* on the death of Sir Philip Sidney, there was no question of the sincerity of his grief. King was a young man of promise; he was a Fellow of Milton's College; he was a poet in a way. Naturally his unhappy death would have stirred Milton's heart.

Again it is complained that Milton's polemical spirit, as expressed in his denunciation of the corrupt clergy, disfigures the poem. It is asserted to be out of place in a song of lament. It may be pointed out that Milton does not simply drag it in. There seems to be an occastion for it. King was intended for the Church. From what we are told of King's last moments in the wrecked vessel when all other passengers were running about in a frantic effort to save their lives, we may well believe, as Milton himself believed, that he would have proved a worthy son of the Church. Milton then might, without any appearance of incongruity, contrast King with the hirelings of the Church. Milton rises to a higher note of passion in this passage. It is interesting because it reveals the growing serious temper of Milton's mind. It looks forward. And after all it does not seem to jar on the prevailing sentiment of grief.

But whether Milton's grief is genuine enough, or whether the denunciation of the corrupt clergy is out of place in the poem, has nothing to do with its proper appreciation. The poem has an independent charm of its own—the charm of melody, which it is difficult to analyse, but which seems to linger on in the memory—a marvellous effect obtained by the collocation of sounds, vowel and consonantal, which are most exquisitely poised and balanced; the charm of pastoral imagery, which, however conventionalised in his contemporary poets, is touched to finer issues in Milton; the charm of Greek myths, reinterpreted by Milton's genius and adapted to the sentiment of grief and so acquiring a tender grace. *Lycidas* blends together all the best elements of Milton's earlier poetry—his pensive decorative fancy, his gift of melodious expression, his reorientation of Greek myths, his attempt to readjust and harmonise Pagan and Christian elements.

18. Selections from the Critics : (*a*) As an elegy derived from the Alexandrian-Sicilian school, *Lycidas* has in its turn served as model to other English dirges of the first interest, especially *Adonais* and *Thrysis* ; but it exceeds both in variety and uniformity of merit, though it is not equal of *Adonais* in loftiness of thought and in the poetical quality of

certain passages. No English poem exhibits a more exquisite harmony and variety of numbers, or a more extraordinary science of rhythm, while very few of anything like the same length have a greater number of signal phrases memorable for thought or music, or both. Indeed, except the untimely speech of St. Peter, which is at the very best a vigorous piece of satiric verse, there is not a passage and hardly a line that is not mere and sheer poetry. The poem, moreover, adds to the knowledge of Milton's power in several minor ways, especially in regard to his extraordinary skill in the use of names. Something of this had been seen before, but not to the extent of the wonderful triplet :—

"Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Look towards Namancos and Bayona's hold."

We care nothing about Bellerus or Namancos or Bayona as persons or places, but we feel, we know, that as words they are right and indispensable. And the passage also exhibits two other main devices of Milton's, the putting of the adjective, especially a monosyllabic adjective, after the noun."

(*Professor Saintsbury*)

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Conventional nature of the pastoral elegy :

(*b*) We must take what the gods give; yet it is not the best fortune that the longer and greater English elegies should all have been framed with artifice, and written with a conscious elaborate splendour, as though uttered to a large audience rather than to the poet himself. Sometimes a song of Webster or of Cowper hits harder than the elegies of Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson. Each of those poets is not only sincere but highly impassioned ; yet it seems to be a law that we are moved so much the less shapely by any expression of loss, as it fails to keep to the object and eddies out into larger contemplations . . . . . . A prolonged elegy—unless indeed, like *In Memoriam*, it consists of a series of separate poems sewn to-

gether almost demands some sort of machinery. (In *Lycidas* and *Adonais* there is the classical traditional machinery with its formal structure. Invocation, sympathy of nature, procession of mourners, personal digression, lament, climax, change of mood, and final consolation—each poet adopts the scheme to his own genius. And the likeness to the type is increased by the note of invective which dignifies *Lycidas* ; but it spoils *Adonais* ; for even had Keats been killed "by an article"—which was not the case—what have Quarterly Reviewers to do with that which is written and conceived under the vision of eternity ?)

(*Professor O. Elton*)

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(*c*) "Lycidas appeals not only to the imagination but to the educated imagination. There is no ebb and flow of poetical power as in *Comus* ; it is an advance on all his previous work, and it fitly closes the poetic labour of his youth......(One of its strange charms is its solemn undertone rising like a religious chant through the elegiac music ; the sense of a stern national crisis in the midst of its pastoral mourning ; the sense of Milton's grave force of character among the flowers and fancies of the poem, the sense of the Christian religion pervading the classical imagery. We might say that these things are ill-fitted to each other. So they would be ; were not the art so fine and the poetry so overmastering ; were they not fused together by genius into a whole so that the unfitness itself becomes fascination."

(*Stopford Brooks*)

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(*d*) "*Lycidas* is the most pastoral in form of all Milton's English poems, more so considerably than the *Arcades* and *Comus*. It is not a direct lyric of lamentation by Milton for the death of King ; it is a phantasy of one shepherd, mourning, in the time of Autumn, the death of fellow-shepherd. The mourning shepherd, however, is Milton himself, and the shepherd mourned for is King ; and through the guise of all the pastoral circumstance and imagery of the poem, there is a

studious representation of the real facts of King's brief life and his accidental death, and of Milton's regard for him and academic intimacy with him.

> "Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
> Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
> We drove a-field, and both together heard
> What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn
> Battening our flocks."

Here is the recollection, pastorally expressed, of their companionship at Cambridge, their walks and talks together there, and their common exercises. In the same manner it has already been hinted to us that among those common exercises was poetry. One reason why Lycidas was now lamented in song, was that he himself and known how "to sing and build the lofty rhyme." All the more inexplicable was his loss. Where had the Nymphs been when this loved votary of theirs was drowned ? Not, certainly, anywhere near the scene of the disaster. Not on the steeps known to the old Bards and Druids (the mountains of North Wales), on the shaggy top of Mona (the Isle of Anglesey), nor by the wizard stream of the Deva (the river Dee and Chester Bay). The topographical exactness here, under the poetic language, is worthy of remark, and is one of Milton's habits. But, had the Nymphs been there, what could they have done ? Had the Muse herself been able to save her son Orpheus ? Dwelling a little on this thought, of the non-immunity of even the finest intellectual promise from the stroke of death, Milton works it into one of the most beautiful and most frequently quoted passages of the poem : "Alas ! what boots it," etc. (lines 64—84). That strain, he says at the end of the passage, had been "of a higher mood," rather beyond the range of the pastoral ; but now he will resume his simple oaten pipe and proceed.

There pass then across the visionary stage three figures in succession. First comes the Herald of the Sea, Triton, who reports, in mythological terms, which yet veil exact information, that the cause of King's death was not tem-

pestuous weather, for the sea was as calm as glass when the ship went down, but either the unseaworthiness of the ship itself or some inherited curse in her very timbers. Next comes Camus, the local deity of the Cam, footing slowly like his own sluggish stream, and with his bonnet of sedge from its banks, staying not long, but uttering one ejaculation over the loss of Cambridge of one of her darling sons. Lastly, in still more mystic and awful guise, comes St. Peter, the guardian of that Church of Christ for the service of which King had been destined,—the apostle to whom the Great Shepherd himself had given it in charge, "Feed my sheep." Not out of place even his grave figure in this peculiar pastoral. For has he not lost one of his truest shepherds, lost him too at a time when he could ill be spared, when false shepherds, hireling shepherds, knowing nothing of the real craft they professed, were more numerous than ever, and the flocks were perishing for lack of care or by the ravages of the stealthy wolf ? It is to the singularly bold and stern passage of denunciation here put into St. Peter's mouth (lines 113-131), and especially to the last lines of the passage, prophesying speedy vengeance and reform, that Milton referred ; in the title prefixed to the poem on its republication in 1645, he intimated that it contained a description of the state of England at the time when it was written, and foretold the ruin of the corrupted English clergy then in their height. In 1638 he had been bold enough to let the passage stand in the poem, as published in the Cambridge memorial volume, without calling attention to it in the title. But, indeed, this passage too had transcended the ordinary limits of the quiet pastoral. The poet is aware of this. Accordingly, when "the dread voice is past that had so pealed over the landscape and caused it to shudder, he calls on Alpheus and the Sicilian Muse, as the patrons of the pastoral proper, to return, and be with him through the pensive remainder. Beautifully pensive it is, and yet with a tendency to soar. First, in strange and evidently studied contrast with the stern speech of St. Peter which has just preceded, is the exquisitely worded passage which follows (lines 143—151). For musical sweetness, and dainty richness of floral colour, it beats perhaps anything else in all Milton. It is the call upon all valleys of the landscape, and the banks of all the secret stream-

lets, to yield up their choicest flowers, and those dearest to shepherds, that they may be strewn over the dead body of Lycidas. Ah ! it is but a fond fancy, a momentary forgetfulness. Far where, meanwhile, is that dead body ? Not anywhere on land at all, to be strewed with flowers and receive a funeral, but whelmed amid the sounding seas, either sunk deep down near the spot of the shipwreck, or drifted thence northward perphaps to the Hebrides, or perhaps southwards to Cornwall and St. Michael's Mount.

"But let the surviving shepherds cease their mourning. Though that body is never again to be seen on earth, Lycidas is not lost. A higher world has received him already ; and there, amid other groves and other streams, having his ozy locks with the nectar of heaven, and listening to the nuptial song, he has joined the society of the Saints, and can look down on the world and the friends he has left, and act as a power promoted for their good. Here the monody or pastoral ends. The last eight lines of the poem do not belong to the monody. They are not a part of the song sung by Milton in his imaginary character as the shepherd who is bewailing the death of Lycidas, but are distinctly a stanza of Epilogue, in which Milton speaks directly, criticises what he has just written in his imaginary character, and intimating that he has stepped out of that character, and is about to turn to other occupations."

(*Professor Masson*)

(*e*) "Less indirectly, Milton related the conflict in his own heart in the elegy called *Lycidas* (1637), which was the last of his early poems in English. It is occasional verse in the conventional pastoral form, and was one of some twenty laments written by young Cambridge men on the death of Edward King, who had been much loved at the University, who seemed assured of a brilliant future, when he was drowned in a shipwreck near Anglesea. Milton and King were not probably very intimate. The grief of a bereaved friend is less apparent in this poem than in the Latin elegy *Epitaphium Damonis*, in which a year later Milton mourned

the loss of his beloved Deodati. Emotions are, however, of several kinds. That *Lycidas* is born of the fact that Milton, thinking of King's fate, is brought back to himself, and it springs also from the highest and rarest of all sources of feeling—the beauty of verse.

The two hundred lines of *Lycidas* are among the most precious treasures of English poetry. Their pastoral dress is out of date and they abound in mythological allusions. There is a religious satire in them, as in Spenser's eclogues ; and they are not eminent for simple pathos. They have a very powerful and special fragrance which cannot be appreciated without some initiation.

It is not King but Milton who should be sought in them. The death of this friend who was so young and whose future promised so much, led Milton to reflect on his own life. Lycidas, or King, had been wont "to scorn delights and live laborious days," devoting himself whole-heartedly to the Muse without ambition of worldly success. To what end, Milton asks. Nowhere else has he so poetically uttered the haunting thoughts :

> Alas ! what boots it with uncessant care
> To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankless Muse !
> Were it not better done as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair ?

Yet he does not hesitate in his choice. Phoebus tells him that the guerdon is not fame, 'that last infirmity of noble minds," but that he must "in heaven expect his meed," and as he thinks of this distant and austere reward he sighs no longer.

His train of thought is interrupted when the Church is suggested, for, like all the more ardent Reformers, those who became Puritans, he was irked by Laud's tyranny and by the Romanising tendency of some churchmen. He inserts an invective which presages the part he was to play in con-

troversy. But it is isolated. *Lycidas* remains the poem of a refined humanist, an example of supreme perfection of style, imagery and versification. A spell is woven as Milton laments that he must sing before his genius is ripe—

> I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
> And with forced fingers rude,
> Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year—

and also by the lines in which he strews the hearse of Lycidas with flowers, then remembers that he has no tomb but the waters, then stays his tears at the vision of his friend rapt to heaven. Art in this poem rebels against strictness, in such wise that the most spiritual poetry constitutes a feast for the most fastidious ear. Milton mastered his instrument to such a point that he could write free verse, obeying no law but his own. The heroic line gives place from time to time to a short line; rhymes follow no fixed order: there are neither couplets nor stanzas, but rhymes variously and flexibly interlaced and occasional unrhymed lines. The only rule is that of the poet's exquisite ear. The echoing sounds cross each other capriciously, now widely separated, now in obedience to the poet's melodic sense, repeated as often as six times, like the sound *ear* in the opening lines. The result is a marvel of liquid, blended harmony whence monotony has been expelled."—

(*Emile Legouis*)

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(*f*) "In Lycidas, Milton outdistances all previous English elegies almost as easily as in *Comus* he had outdistanced all the earlier masks. It stands with the great passages of *Paradise Lost* as the most consummate blending of scholarship and poetry in Milton and therefore in English. All pastoral poetry is in it. Theocritus and Virgil, Spenser and Sidney Drayton and Drummond, with memories, too, of Ovid and Shakespeare and the Bible; and yet it is pure and undiluted Milton, with signs of his peculiar mind and temper stamped on its every phrase.........Milton had liked and respected Edward King, no doubt, but had certainly not been so intimate with him as with young Charles Diodati

who died almost exactly a year later, and was lamented by his great friend in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, which is the finest of the Latin poems.........But if the death of Diodati aroused the deeper sorrow, that is not the case here. Shelley wrote *Adonais* about Keats whom he knew very little; Spenser *Daphamaida* about a lady whom he did not know at all. It is not the actual experience of sorrow that the elegiac poet needs; but the power of heart and imagination to conceive it and the power of language to give it fit expression, Moreover, the poet's real subject is not the death of Keats or King or Mrs. Georges; it is the death of all who have been or will be loved in all the world, and the sorrow of all the survivors, the tragic destiny of youth and hope and fame, the doom of frailty and transience which has been eternally pronounced on so many of the fairest gifts of Nature and all the noblest works of man.

About *Lycidas*, criticism has less to say than to unsay. Johnson's notorious attack upon it is only the extremest instance of the futility of applying to poetry the tests of prose and of the general incapacity of that generation to apply any other.........Johnson and the rest of that age were right in perceiving that pastoral elegy had very commonly been an insincere affectation, a mere exercise in writing; the age into which they were born denied them the ear that could hear the amazing music of *Lycidas* or perceive the sensuous, imaginative, spiritual intensity which drowns its incongruities in a flood of poetic life. There is a still more important truth which that generation could not see. Prose aims at expressing facts directly and sometimes succeeds. That is what Johnson liked, and practised himself with masterly success. But when he and others like him asked that poetry should do the same they were asking that she should deny her nature. She knows that her truth can only be expressed or suggested by its imaginative equivalents ......poetry can neither deal directly with King's death or Milton's grief, nor be content with a subject which is a mere fact in time and space. If it did, the effect produced would not be poetic effect; the experience of the reader would not be a poetic experience. The poet must transform or transcend the facts which have set his powers to work; he must escape

from them or rather lift them up with him new-created into the world of the imagination; he must impose upon them a new form, invented or accepted by himself and in any case so heated by his own fire of poetry that it can fuse and reshape the matter submitted to it into that unity of beauty which is a work of art. That is what Milton does in *Lycidas* by the help of the pastoral fiction; and what he could not have done without it or some imaginative substitute for it.

"The truest criticism on his pastoralism is really that the mould was too small and fragile to hold all he wanted to put into it. The great outburst of St. Peter, with its scarcely disguised assault upon the Laudian clergy, strains it almost to bursting. Yet no one would wish it away; for it adds a passage of Miltonic fire to what but for Phoebus and St. Peter would be too plaintive to be fully characteristic of Milton, whose genius lay rather in strength than in tenderness. Yet perhaps we love *Lycidas* all the more for giving us our almost solitary glimpse of a Milton in whom the affections are more than the will, and sorrow not sublimated into resolution. Its modesty, too, is astonishing ....And the presence of the same overmastering emotion which compelled him to begin is felt throughout. There is no poem of his in which he appears to make so complete a surrender to the changing moods of passion. The verses seem to follow his heart and fancy just where they choose to lead.........Twice he seems to be going to escape out of the world of pastoral, as he strikes his own trumpet note of confident faith and stern judgment; twice the unfailing instinct of art calls him back and makes a beauty of what might have been a mere incongruity.

(*Baily*)

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Political passion in Lycidas : (g) "In *Lycidas* (1637) we have reached the high-water-mark of English Poesy and of Milton's own production. A period of a century and a half was to elapse before poetry in England seemed, in Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality* (1807), to be rising

again towards the level of inspiration which it had attained in *Lycidas*. And in the development of the Miltonic genius this wonderful dirge marks the culminating point. As the twin idylls of 1632 show a great advance upon the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), the growth of the poetic mind during the five years which follow 1632 is registered in *Lycidas*. Like *L' Allegero* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* is laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction; like them it offers exquisite touches of idealised rural life. But *Lycidas* opens up a deeper vein of feeling, a patriot passion so vehement and dangerous that, like that which stirred the Hebrew prophet, it is compelled to veil itself from power, or from sympathy, in utterance made purposely enigmatical. The passage which begins "Last came and last did go," raises in us a thrill of awe-struck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. For the reader to feel this, he must have present in memory the circrmstances of England in 1637. He must place himself as far as possible in the position of a contemporay. The study of Milton's poetry compels the study of his time; and Professor Masson's six volumes are not too much to enable us to understand that there were real causes for the intense passion which glows underneath the poet's words—a passion which unexplained would be thought to be intrusive.

The historical exposition must be gathered from the English history of the period, which may be read in Professor Masson's excellent summary. All I desire to point out here is, that in *Lycidas*, Milton's original picturesque vein is for the first time crossed with one of quite another sort, stern, determined, obscurly indicative of suppressed passion, and the resolution to do or die. The fanaticism of the covenanter and the sad grace of Petrarch seem to meet in Milton's monody Yet these opposites, insead of neutralising each other, are blended into one harmonious whole by the presiding, but invisible, genius of the poet. The conflict between the old cavalier world—the years of gaiety and festivity of a splendid and pleasureloving court—and the now puritan world into which love and pleasure were not to enter—this conflict which was commencing in the

social life of England, is also begun in Milton's own breast, and is reflected in *Lycidas* :

> For we were nursed upon the self-same hill

Here is the sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian time, upon whose joys Death is the only intruder. Pass onward a little, and you are in presence of the tremendous,

> Two-handed engine at the door,

the terror of which is enhanced by its obscurity. We are very sure that the avenger is there, though we know not who he is. In these thirty lines we have the preluding mutterings of the storm which was to sweep away mask and revel and song, and to inhibit the drama, and suppress poetry. In the earlier poems Milton's Muse has sung in the tones of the age that is passing away ; the poet is, except in his austere chastity, a cavalier, though even in *L' Allegro*, Dr Johnson truly detects 'some melancholy in his mirth.' In *Lycidas*, for a moment, the tones of both ages, the past and the coming, are combined, and Milton leaves behind him for ever the golden age, and one half of his poetic genius. He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes, 'To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new'.

(*Mark Pattison*)

(*h*) *Milton's Puritanism in Lycidas* : The hand that wrote *Comus* has not lost its cunning ; but we do not find in *Lycidas* that unity of subject which charms us in the Ludlow Mask. The train of thought is divided, as the later title intimates, between the private grief and prophecy of woe coming upon England. The interval of three years had increased the confidence of the clergy. To silence every voice that their own lightest whisper might be heard, to keep in abeyance the settlement or to prohibit the discussion of questions felt to be vital by men more earnest and not less able than themselves, was the constantly sustained intention with which those in authority strained every existing statute, and were prepared to assume a power above the law.

While the bishops in the court of High Commission were judging not merely the acts, but the supposed tendencies of others with unrelenting severity—their chief, Laud, ever the harshest and hardest—the effects of their own system, palpable to others, were to them invisible. The increasing number of proselytes to the old Church, his own inability to check the Romeward progress of his disciples, the Pope's offer of a red hat to himself, might surely have warned the archbishop that he was steering direct 'for Latium'. Men who saw these things, and therefore distrusted their spiritual pastors and masters, were not without excuse, even though some counterbigotry was evinced in the stand made against the less important innovations.

In *Lycidas* we hear the first note of the trumpet which was to be to the English throne and church as were those blown before the walls of Jericho. In *Lycidas* we see the first indications of the vigour and the coarseness that strengthen and disfigure the Prose Works. And in *Lycidas* we have the intimation of two facts regarding Milton; He considered the day of his youth to be closed by the death of the friend of his yóuth—that on the morrow he was to seek 'fresh woods and pastures new.' But his choice has been made. His mantle is already of the Presbyterian colour. Henceforth there will be no more quiet communing with English oaks and rills. A brief holiday interposes between him and a 'time of chiding,' which with small respite will vex his spirit till wearied and worn, he rests at last ;

Though fall'n on evil days,
"On evil days though fall'n and evil tongues."

(*R. C. Brown*)

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(*i*) *Johnson's Criticism of Lycidas* : One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is *Lycidas* ; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. What beauty there is, we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion ; for passion runs

not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough *satyrs* and *fauns with cloven heel*. Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief.

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth : there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a *pastoral*, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting : whatever images it can supply, are long ago exhausted ; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. When Cowley tells of Hervey that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours, and the partner of his discoveries ; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines !

> We drove a field, and both together heard
> What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove a field, and that they had no flocks to batten, and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote, that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found.

Among the flocks, and copses, and flowers, appear the heathen deities ; Jove and Phoebus, Neptune and Aeolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping : and how one god asks another god what is become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy ; he who thus praises will confer no honour.

This poem has yet a grosser fault. With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverend combination. The shepherd likewise is now a feeder of sheep and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a

Christian flock. Such equivocations are always unskilful; but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious.

Such is the power of reputation justly acquired, that its blaze drives away the eye from nice examination. Surely no man could have fancied that he read *Lycidas* with pleasure, had he not known its author.

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MASSON'S REPLY TO JOHNSON'S CRITICISM

(*j*) *Personal feeling in the Poem* : It is a sheer assumption that Milton offered the poem as an utterance of passion, or intense personal grief .. . .The intimacy and affection (between Milton and King) were considerable......And the death of that young scholar, so melancholy in its mode, did indeed move Milton, as it must have moved many. Here was one fine young life cut short, recklessly cut short, when thousands of coarser lives were spared, when England and the Church of England had need that the best only should be prolonged. The recollection of the face and voice of Edward King, and of hours spent in his society, would return at the news. What more natural than that Milton should throw his feelings on the event, and the whole train of thought which it suggested, into artistic form in a memorial form ? This is precisely what *Lycidas* is. It is the same kind of tribute from a poet to the memory of a friend as a bust, with pedestal and bas-reliefs, would have been from a painter. Personal feeling is present ; but it blends with, and passes into, the feeling of the artist thinking of his subject.

(*k*) *The naturalness of the feeling* : Johnson's criticism would abolish, by implication, all poetry whatsoever. In that crude sense of what is "natural" which his criticism begs, all poetry is unnatural. No poem, even of passion, can possibly be "natural" in the sense of being a record of the exact mental procedure consentaneous with, or appropriate to, the immediate moment of the passion. If passion "runs not after remote allusions and obscure

opinions", if passion "plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius", neither does passion perform such simple acts of literary art as the construction of clear sentences, the for mation of lines of metre, or the invention of rhymes. Grief in its first act, in poets as in other people, consumes itself in "Ohs" and "Ahs", in sobs and agitated gestures, in dull number musings, incoherent verbal bursts, pacing ; of the chamber through the weary night. To poets, however, as soon as there is a lull of comparative tranquillity, and aiding perhaps to bring on that lull, there comes the use of those artifices of expression which are with them hardly artifices any longer, but the very habits of their minds. Then is produced the lay of the occasion, the song or longer poem, recording the grief indeed, and even renewing and deepening it, but weaving into the grief all beauty of cognate story and meditation that it will bear. True, there will still be gradations of apparent closeness to the primary moment or remoteness from it, according either to the intensity of the original grief or to the poet's acquired habits of artistic working. Simplest of all, least removed of all from the original moment of feeling, and therefore most likely in some poets, and most natural in seeming to most readers, will be the direct lyric of sorrow in a few passionate stanzas. Burn's *Highland Mary* and other songs of his, are examples. But there may be memorial poems, tributes to recent or past personal grief, which shall be as true and natural and yet be of more extensive design and more complex feature. These may contain trains of varied thought and phantasy which the original feeling has originated, and therefore may claim as its own, they may be speculative and occult, or figurative and mythological, as the habits of the poet's thinking may determine ; even Mincius and Arethuse need not be absent nor rough satyrs and fauns with cloven heel. Witness Shelleys's *Adonais* to the memory of Keats. Or witness Tennyson's *In Memoriam.* What is the chief of memorial poems in the English tongue but an aggregation of lyrics in which though one deep and enduring personal feeling moved them all and pervades them all, "remote allusions and obscure opinions," beyond the learning of Johnson's time, are plentifully interwoven, snatches of story occur and recur,

and all the science and metaphysics of the time become relevant to one death ? Now Milton's *Lycidas* is not, and does not profess to be, a poem of such personal sorrow, by many degrees, as *In Memoriam*. Nay, as Edward King was not a Keats, it is presumably less a poem of personal sorrow than *Adonais*. All the more are the traces of deliberate and conscious art which are visible in it to be regarded as consistent with the poet's actual kind and amount of feeling when he wrote it, and his true intention. There *are* such traces. Twice in the body of the poem Milton restrains or checks himself, as having passed somewhat the strict bounds of the strain in which he had begun; and at the close there is an epilogue, in his own name, characterising the poem as a "Doric lay", in which "the tender stop of various quills" had been touched, and also hinting that the artist is moving on to other themes, which will require a different treatment.

(*l*) *The pastoral form an established convention* : One established, and indeed prevalent, artifice in the poetry of Milton's day was the artifice of the pastoral form, and Johnson's criticism exhibits an utter obtuseness to the real nature, meaning, and power of this artifice. "They never drove a-field and they had no flocks to batten"! No, nor did Theocritus or Virgil ever keep sheep, or pipe on oaten flutes beneath the beech-trees. Nor did the Portuguese pastoral poets do the like nor Sannazaro and the Italians. Nor was Spenser a real Colin Clout, with Sidney, and Raleigh, and Shakespeare, and all the other poets, or other eminent Englishmen of the day, surrounding him as actual shepherds called Astrophel, and Cuddie, and Willie, and Thomaline ! What then ? We know what they meant. It is one thing to hold that the pastoral form might still suit our modern times, and to wish that it were preserved ; it is another to understand what the form was in the hands of those who did practise it, and to see its imporatance in the past history of our literature. Spenser and the other pastoralists would have smiled in scorn at the notion that the pastoral should be an exhibition of real shepherd-life, of the thoughts and manners of real shepherds. With them the pastoral form was a device—just as metre and rhyme were devices, but in some

respects of larger consequence—for *distancing* themselves from the ordinary and prosaic, and enabling them to live and move mentally in a more poetic air. It was *themselves*, with all their experiences and acquired ideas and feelings, that they flung into an imaginary Arcadian world, to be shepherds there, and under the guise of that imaginary life, express their own real feelings, their most intimate experiences, and their thoughts about affairs in monologue or dialogue. Defensible or not originally, desirable or not among ourselves as many think this artifice of pastoralism, this device for poets of an imaginary removal of themselves into an Arcadian land in order to think under Arcadian conditions, it is gross ignorance not to know how largely it once prevailed, and what a wealth of old poetry we owe to it. From the youth of Spenser himself, the pastoralist-in-chief, on through the lives of the next generation, much of the finest English poetry is in the pastoral form. During that period the word "sherpherd" was an accepted synonym in England for the word "poet". They all, the finest of them all, "drove-a-field" together, and "battened their flocks" in verse, though they had no flocks to batten. Milton, an admirer of Spenser, and describable as the truest of the Spenserians, employed the pastoral form in his *Lycidas*, as he had employed it already, though less decidedly, in other of his poems. He threw the story of his acquaintatance with Edward King and of the sad death of that youth by drowning, and all the train of thought about the state of England which that death suggested, into the form of a personal lament for their shepherd, conceived as spoken by himself as a surviving shepherd. And who would wish now that he had done otherwise ? What would a simple narrative of the shipwreck, or a few stanzas of direct regret, have been in comparison with the poem we now read ? It is better than any memorial bust with bas-reliefs, better than any memoral picture. It tells the facts with the minutest fidelity but it gives them in the setting of one long mood of Milton's mind as he mused over them. And it is this setting that has made the facts immortal. If we now remember Edward King of Christ's College at all, or know that there was ever such a youth in the world, is it not owing to Milton's monody ?"

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LYCIDAS

"In this Monody the author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown'd in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637 ; and by occasion foretells the ruine of our corrupted Clergie then in their height".

YET once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forced fingers rude
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due ;
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
Who would not sing for Lycidas ? he knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.
Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring ;
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain and coy excuse ;
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destined urn,
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

LYCIDAS

Paraphrase

Lines 1–14. Yet once more, ye groves of laurel, once more ye dark coloured myrtles and ivy with leaves never fading! I come to gather your berries while they are still sour and unripe, and with compelling and rough fingers to disturb you before the due season of harvest time. For Lycidas is dead, dead ere he had reached the prime of his life, and has not left his equal. What poet would not weep for Lycidas? He was himself skilled in the composition of noble verse. He must not float upon his ocean grave without a lament, nor turn over before the blasts of parching wind without his due of some sad poetical mention.

Lines 15–22. Support me then, O muses, from the sacred well which rises near the altar of Jove on Mount Helicon! Begin with a full touch upon the strings of your lyre. Do not refuse nor offer shy excuses. In such a way may some gentle poet bestow kind words over the tomb to which I am destined, and stop in passing to call down peaceful greetings over my dark grave clothes!

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill :
Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,
We drove a-field, and both together heard
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the star that rose at evening bright
Toward Heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,
Tempered to the oaten flute ;
Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long,
And old Damætas loved to hear our song.
But, O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return !
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.
The willows, and the hazel copses green,
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows :
Such, Lycidas, the loss to shepherd's ear.
Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas ?
For neither were ye playing on the steep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,

Lines 23—36. Lycidas and I were reared on the same hill-side, and as shepherds we tended the same flock by the side of the fountains, in the shadows, by the rills. Together, before the upper pastures were visible under the first peep of daylight, we drove our flocks to the fields, and we both listened together at the sultry midday hour when the note of the gray-fly is heard. We let our flocks feed when the fresh dews of night had fallen, many a time until the star that rises at evening time had turned his western course to the horizon again. Meanwhile local poets were not wanting, their songs accompanied by the music of the shepheɪd's pipe of straw. Rough Satyrs danced with us, and Fauns with their goat-like hoofs could not long remain away from our merriment. Old Domæatus loved to listen to our songs.

Lines 37—49. What a sad change, now that you have departed never to return! The woods and the desert caves, covered with wild thyme and overgrown by the climbing vine, all their echoes too, all mourn for you, O Lycidas. The willow bushes and the green hazel groves shall no more be seen to wave their leaves joyously in rhythm with your gentle song. To the shepherds your loss is as fatal as is the canker-worm to the rose, the taint-worm to the young grazing lambs, or frost to flowers that display their gay colours in the spring, when first the hawthorn blossoms.

Lines 50—63. Where were you, spirits of Nature, when the cruel sea closed over the head of your belovd Lycidas? You were not playing on the steep hillsides where lie the

Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.
Ay me! I fondly dream,
Had ye been there—for what could that have done?
What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,
Whom universal Nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore ?
  Alas ! what boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days ;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears :
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glittering foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove ;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heaven expect thy meed."

bones of your ancient poets, the Druids, nor on the forest-covered summit of Anglesey. Neither were you where the mystic stream of the Dee wanders. Alas, I foolishly imagine that, if you had been there—but of what avail would that have been? What was the chief Muse herself, the mother of Orpheus, able to do for her enchanting son, who was mourned for by all nature, when the mob who made the hideous uproar sent his blood-stained head floating down the river Hebrus to Lesbos?

Alas, of what avail is it to devote incessant toil on the humble and despised art of poesy, and bestow deep study on the ungrateful deity of art? Would it not be as well to do as others are doing, to dally with pleasant and light subjects and write light verses on feminine charms? Fame is the stimulant which inspires the pure soul (Fame, that greatest weakness of the noble), bidding us despise pleasures and live a life of labour. But when we hope to receive our fair reward, thinking that we shall burst forth with our sudden triumph, along comes unseeing Destiny with her hateful implements and terminates the frail life.

Lines 64—84. "But does not terminate the glory!" Phoebus reminds me as he touches my sensitive ears, "Fame has not its roots in earthly soil, but in Heaven. It is not made attractive by glittering tinsel to appeal to the world, nor does it consist in the report of the many, but exists and rises under the pure eyes of God. It depends on the full testimony of God, Who judges all, as He passes His decision on every deed of man. That is the standard by which you may expect fame in Heaven.

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood,
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood :
But now my oat proceeds,
And listens to the herald of the sea,
That came in Neptune's plea.
He asked the waves, and asked the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain ?
And questioned every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked promontory
They knew not of his story ;
And sage Hippotades their answer brings :
That not a blast was from his dungeon strayed,
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters played.
It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.
"Ah ! who hath reft" (quoth he) "my dearest pledge ?"
Last came, and last did go,
The Pilot of the Galilean Lake ;
Two massy keys he bore of metals twain
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain) ;
He shook his mitted locks, and stern bespake :
"How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
Enow of such as, for their bellies' sake,
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold !

Lines 85—102. O fountain of Arethuse, and honoured river of Mincius, fringed with musically-rustling reeds, let your pastoral spirit return to me. That voice I heard from Phoebus was higher than my pastoral strain, but now the notes of my shepherd's pipe resume their theme, as I listen to the herald who comes to speak for Neptune, god of the sea. He asked the waves and the wicked winds what cruel mishap had doomed this gentle poet to his death. He asked each gust of rough and wicked wind that blows from every out-jutting cape, but they had not heard the story of Lycidas. The wise Wind-god brought their answer, that not a gust had strayed on that day from outside the prison where he kept them. The air was calm and on the level face of the sea the Nereidas all disported themselves. It was that deadly and treacherous ship, built during the time of the eclipse and fitted out to the accompaniment of wicked curses, that was to blame for the death of the fair Lycidas.

Lines 103—107. Next came reverend Father Camus, walking slowly in his rough mantle and crown of sedges. His mantle edge was embroidered with dim devices, like those of the blood-stained flower of woe, the hyacinth. "Ah," said he, "who has torn away the dearest pledge of my love?"

Lines 108—131. Last to come and last to go was St. Peter, the pilot of the sea of Galilee. He bore two massive keys of different metals; the golden one opens while the iron key shuts fast. He shook his head, which wore a mitre, and sternly said :

Of other care they little reckoning make
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
Blind mouths ! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs !
What recks it them ? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw ;
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread ;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said ;
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."
  Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells, and flowerets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,

"How gladly would I have lost, rather than you, young shepherd, any number of those who for the sake of profit come stealthily intruding into the shepherds' community. They make no account of any other consideration than to thrust themselves in when the shepherds' festival is held, elbowing aside the worthy members who have a right to be there. Ignorant gluttons, who do not even know how to handle a shepherd's crook, nor have learnt the smallest of the duties that is necessary to the art of the faithful shepherd ! What do they care? They have prospered in this world. When they feel inclined, their miserable and showy songs sound forth on inferior instruments. The hungry sheep look to them for food, but receive none, but are swollen up with gases and the poisonous mist which they inhale, till disease consumes them inwardly and the infection spreads. In addition, the grim wolf with its secret captures daily eats them up, without protest from those shepherds. But the two-edged sword of justice is ready waiting for them to strike but one blow which it will not be necessary to repeat.

Lines 132–164. Return now, O pastoral spirit ! St. Peter's terrible voice, which stopped your poem's course has now gone. Return, spirit of Theocritus ; speak to the valleys and bid them throw hitherwards their blossoms and flowers of a thousand colours. Low valleys, where the mild winds frequent the shady places, playful winds and gushing brooks ; valleys where the dog-star throws its meagre influence, throw hitherward all your quaint and curious flowers that drink the sweet showers which fall on the turf ; the sweet flowers that

The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears ;
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies,
For, so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise ;
Ay me ! whilst thee the shores and sounding
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled ;
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps, under the whelming tide,
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world ;
Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great Vision of the guarded mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold :
Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth ;
And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.
  Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor ;
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky :
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,
Where, other groves and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,

colour all the grounds with the blossoms of spring. Bring the early-blooming primrose that dies in solitude, the tufts of crow-toe blossom and the pale jessamine, the white blossoms of the pink, the pansy spotted with black, and the rich-coloured violet. Bring the musk-rose and the woodbine dressed with its quiet colours, the pale cowslips which hang their heads as if in thought, and every flower which wears, pale colours. Tell the amaranthus to relinquish its beauty and the lily to fill its cup-shaped flowers with tears,—all to scatter on the poet's bier of Lycidas. Just to give us a little interval of comforting thought, let our weak human minds dally with this untrue assumption (that his body is here). For meanwhile, alas, the shores and roaring seas are over you far away from here, wherever your body may have been carried. Is it beyond the stormy islands of the Hebrides in the north, where, perhaps, under the tide which overwhelms you, you visit the ocean-bottom, the home of monsters? Or perhaps, you are unavailable at our tearful rites because you sleep near that place associated with the ancient legend of Bellerus, where the spectre of Michael on the mountain which he guards looks across the sea towards Namancos and the fortress of Bayona. Look towards your own home, St. Michael, and you will melt with pity. O, dolphins of the sea, convey the body of the luckless youth!

Lines 165—181. Weep no more, shepherds, weep no more! Lycidas, for whom you sorrow, is not dead, though he is sunk beneath the watery surface of the ocean. Thus the sun sinks beneath the ocean level, yet presently renews his failing strength, brightens his beams again, and with fresh-sparkling gold shines like a jewel on the forehead of the sky. So Lycidas, who has sunk low, is now again mounted on high, through the loving power of Christ who walked upon the sea of Galilee. Among groves and streams other than

And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the saints above,
In solemn troops and sweet societies,
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more ;
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood,
Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
While the still Morn went out with sandals gray ;
He touched the tender stops of various quills,
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay :
And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
And now was dropt into the western bay ;
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue :
To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

those of this world he washes his mud-stained hair with pure nectar, and hears the indescribable song of reunion with Christ in the heavenly kingdoms of joy and love. There all the saints in heaven above entertain him in their solemn assemblies, and with their sweet companionship. They sing, and, as they sing, move in majesty, and wipe away all tears of grief from his eyes.

Lines 181—185. Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more, for you are from this time the presiding spirit of the sea-shore, and shall be helpful to all who travel on the dangerous sea.

Lines 186—193. Thus sang the uncultured shepherd to the oaks and streams, while the quiet morning passed with its gray colours. He handled the tender stops of the various notes on his pipe, while his eager thoughts were intent on singing his pastoral song. Soon the sun lengthened the shadows of all the hills, and presently sank in the bay to the west. At last he rose and drew his blue mantle around his shoulders. To-morrow he would depart for fresh woods and new pasture grounds.

LYCIDAS

Notes and Explanations

Monody, originally an ode for a single reciter in Greek plays; but used in English as an equivalent for a dirge or an elegy.

This description of the poem was added later; the publication of the poem (i.e. in the Cambridge volume in memory of King) merely contained the title 'Lycidas' Milton probably did not wish to express *in plain language* his views on the 'corrupted clergy' as early as 1638. The final version of *Lycidas* was made in 1645.

1-14. Milton, in the guise of a shepherd, explains why he has broken his silence, and written a poem. Since *Comus*

(1634) he had written nothing in English, but was enjoying (at Horton) "a complete holiday in turning over Latin and Greek authors." Laurels, myrtles and ivy stand for poetry, or literature, for great poets were often garlanded with these.

Another possible explanation (*not* usually accepted) is that the poet collects flowers and leaves for strewing them on the tomb of his friend—i.e. 'to strew the *laureate* hearse where Lycid lies' (151).

1. *yet once more*, reference to Milton's silence after *Comus*. According to some he is referring to '*one more*' sad occasion for writing an elegy: he had already written two—on the death of a 'Fair Infant dying of a cough' and 'An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester.' He was also to write some more elegies after *Lycidas*—'Epitaphium Damonis' on the death of his best friend Diodati, and the sonnet 'On the religious memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomason.'

laurels, symbolical of poetry. In the Middle Ages graduates at the English Universities were decked with wreaths of laurels; and 'laurels' is often used in the sense of 'victory' or 'glory.' Cf. also the phrase 'Poet-*laureate*.'

2. *Ivy*, sacred to Bacchus.

2. *brown*, dark. Cf. the Italian *bruno*; and also *Il Penseroso* 134-5.

> 'And shadows *brown*, that Sylvan loves,
> Of pine or monumental oak.'

sere, withered, dried up; (also *sear*) ; used metaphorically also in a phrase like 'sere age.' (Anglo-Saxon 'Sear') Cf. *Macbeth*, V. 3, 23—

> 'My way of life
> Is fallen into the *sear*, the yellow leaf'.

1-2. All the plants mentioned here are evergreens; and hence, they are emblems of immotality also. The poem

closes by suggesting that Lycidas has become 'immortal' (l. 16t). Lord Byron uses there three plants for a different purpose—he contrasts 'myrtle and ivy' as symbols of youthful mirth with the 'laurel' that signifies 'victory' or 'fame' e.g. *All for love* 3-4

> And the myrtle and ivy of sweet two-and-twenty
> Are worth all your laurels, though ever so plenty."

3. *crude*, unripe, raw (L. *crudus*=raw) cf. *Comus*, 479.

4. *forced*, compelled (by the occasion—King's death).

rude, rough, without grace.

5. *Shatter*, disturb, scatter, *before......year* i.e. before the mellowing (ripening) year shatters them. The 'year' (i.e. time) will disturb them when they are ripe: the poet anticipates Time. Note that evergreens do not shed their leaves all at once : the process is very gradual. It is really the berries that mellow during the proper season.

3-5. 'I come to pluck your unripe berries, and to disturb your leaves before they are disturbed by Time—Time that ripens them and makes them fall.' Milton is obviously referring to his own immaturity as a poet. He had decided to read widely and intensively before producing any more poems; but the death of his friend King came as a severe, shock, and hence he is driven to attempt one more poem before his poetic talents have fully matured. We may paraphrase : "Here I am—compelled to write one more poem (almost juvenile) before my poetic powers have really matured..."

6. *bitter constraint*, relentless necessity ; bitter compulsion.

sad occasion dear, In Milton the noun is very frequently placed between two adjectives,—probably due to the influence of Greek. Cf. the famous phrase of Gray 'purest ray serene.' *dear*, affecting, or touching deeply ; hence, "a sad occasion that moves me immensely." [The word *dear* is used in Shakespeare in the sense of important, excessive, serious etc; thus he even speaks of 'dearest spite' (So I, made by fortune's *dearest* spite') and of 'dearest foe ('Would I

had met my dearest foe in heaven')—Sonnet 37 ; *Hamlet* I, 3, 182.]

compels, we should say '*compel.*' though it should not be forgotten that 'bitter constraint' and 'sad occasion dear' *together* constitute the poet's reason for disturbing the laurels, etc. In Elizabethan writers the verb often agrees with the subject that is nearest. (See Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar*, pp. 134-8).

7. *compels....due* i.e. makes me 'disturb' your mellowing season (*season due*), by plucking your berries earlier.

8. *Lycidas*, the name adopted by Milton for Edward King. *Lycidas* is the name of a shepherd in Theocritus (Idyl VII). In a pastoral elegy such names are very common. In his *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton calls his friend Diodati, 'Damon', and himself 'Thyrsis.' Cf. also Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis*.

ere his prime, even before he had attained his manhood; quite young; he was only twenty-five years old.

9. *peer*, equal. 'Lycidas has left no equal' (L. *par*).

8-9. Note the repetition of the words 'dead' and 'Lycidas'; it heightens the effect of the lines. It is an accepted rhetorical device. Cf. the repetition in *Camus*, 50. Editors also quote from Spenser's *Astrophel*—

> "Young Astrophel, the pride of Shepheards praise,
> Young Astrophel, the rusticke lasses love."

For a very playful repetition of a name, see Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals*, II, 3. He repeats the name *walla* in *six* lines. But the best parallel is from *the Shepherd's Calendar*, 37-40.

> "For dead is Dido, dead alas and drent,
> Dido, the great shephearde his daughter sheene.
> The fairest May she was that ever went,
> Her like she has not left behind I weene."

10-11. *he knew....sing*, i.e., 'Lycidas himself was a poet. We have not much evidence to show that Edward

King was a great poet. Mr. Masson speaks of a few Latin pieces by him, and adds that 'they are not very poetical or elegant.' Perhaps Milton and his friends had read some of King's poems, that have never seen the light of the day. It is necessary to bear in mind that King was regarded by all as a youth of very great promise.

11. *and build...,rhyme* write (or compose) poetry of a very high order. The correct spelling of *rhyme* is *rime* (from A.S. *rim*), 'Rhyme' is due to the analogy with 'rhythm.' Cf. Tennyson's *Oenone:*

> "Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all
> My sorrow with my song...."

12. *watery bier*, i.e., biert (a carriage, or a frame of wood for carrying dead bodies to the grave) made of the water of the sea. "The body of Lycidas should not float upon the waves . . . Shelley uses the phrase 'watery bier' in his *Lines written among the Eugenean Hills—*

> "Now is come a darker day;
> And thou soon must be his prey-
> If the power that raised there
> Hallow so thy watery bier."

13. *welter to*, to wallow (in mire, etc.) ; here in the sense of 'roll about' or 'be tossed about' by the wind.

14. *meed* reward; *melodious tear* i.e. grief expressed in poetry, in elegies.

without.... tear i.e. unwept, 'unhonoured and unsung'; without the 'tears of the Muses.' (Cf. Spenser).

The line was once again utilised by Milton for his elegy on Diodati (in Latin); and Coleridge, speaking of Burns, says (*To a Friend*)—

> "And shall he die unwept and sink to earth
> Without the mead of one melodious tear ?"

15-20. Milton invokes the aid of the Muses. The invocation is again in the style of a pastoral elegy—found even in Theocritus (Idyll I) and imitated by several poets.

15-16. *Sisters....spring*, the 'Sisters' are the Nine Muses of Greek mythology. They are said to be the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (a Titaness—Memory'), and are the goddesses of all fine arts. Originally they were regarded as 'nymphs of inspiring wells'; (see Smith's *Cl. Dictionary*;) later on they were associated with Mount Helicon, and the '*sacred well*' is a reference to either Aganippe or Hippo crene on Mt. Helicon. The 'sacred well' i.e. the fountain is under the 'seat of Jove'—i.e. the altar dedicated to Jove on Mt. Helicon. *Il Penseroso* 47-48—

'And hears the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing.'

17. *sweep the string* i.e. play on the lyre.

18. *Hence with....*, enough of your false excuses.

19. *Muse*, here in the sense of 'a poet.'

20. *my destined urn*, the grave (or tomb) in which I am destined to lie. *Urn* usually denotes the vessel in which the ashes of a dead man are kept ; hence frequently used in the sense of 'tomb.'

22. *sable shroud*, black winding-sheets; *shroud*= winding-sheet, (from A.S. *scrud*).

sable, originally the deep black fur of the animal called *sable* ; now indicates, morning, etc.

19-22. Milton means that he is writing an elegy in memory of his dead friend, for he himself wishes that some poet should sing of *his* death also in immortal verse. We may render the passage thus—"(I am now mourning the death of Lycidas in a song.) May some gentle poet similarly sing of my death, and wish that I enjoy eternal peace in my grave..."!

Some interpret *so*='on condition that I mourn for Lycidas': (e.g. *Verity*). But *so*=similarly, or 'in the same' (i.e. after Milton's manner) gives better sense.

23-50. Milton describes his close association with King at Combridge, and points out how even Nature must mourn his loss ; the pastoral imagery continues—the imagery which

called forth from Dr. Johnson his famous criticism—"We know that they never drove a-field, and that they had no flocks to batten..." (see *Intro.*)

23. *we ... hill*, 'we were brought up on the same hill,' i.e. both were educated at the same institution. Milton is referring to the days they spent at Cambridge, and the '*hill*' thus denotes the University of Cambridge.

24. *fed the same flock*, pursued the same studies; spent time in similar pursuits.

rill, a small stream.

25-36. A conventional description of shepherds' ways of life. It emphasises the close association of the two friends. They must have frequently met at Cambridge. It should also be noted that King's tutor was one Mr. William Chappell, who had guided Milton's studies also.

25-6. 'we were together, driving our flock in the fields, even before the lawns were visible in the dim twilight of the dawn...' *lawns*, pastures; cf. *L'Allegro*, 71-2.

> 'Russet *lawns*, and fallows grey
> Where the nibbling flocks do stray;

under....Morn, cf. Marlowe, (*Jew of Malta*) :

> 'Now, Phoebus, ope the eyelids of the day,'

Todd traces the phrase to a marginal variation of the translation of *Job*, III, 9 in the Authorised Version of the Bible. The margin gives the reading "the eyelids of the morning" in place of "dawning of the day" in the following sentence—

> "....neither let it see the dawning of the day."

27. *drove a-field*, drove our flocks.

27-8. *heard ... horn*, 'heard the gray-fly....sound her horn by noon...'.

sultry, indicates 'noon'—the blazing heat of the sun.

28. *what time*, at the time when ....; cf. *Comus* 291.

gray-fly, some kind of 'fly' or gnat, making a humming. sound. Editors do not agree about the exact nature of this 'fly.'

29. *battening our flocks*, i.e. feeding our flocks ; *batten*= to fatten, make fat ; usually the verb is intransitive and means 'to grow fat.' Cf. *Hamlet* III, 4, 67-8—

> 'Could you on this fair mountain have to feed,
> And *batten* on this moor ? '

Of Scandinavian origin, the word *batten*, used at Oxford in the sense of 'provisions', etc., is said to be derived from the same origin.

30. *the star .... bright*, the evening star, *Hesperus;* cf. *Comus* 93.

31. *westering*, setting or sinking in the west.

29-31. 'feeding our flocks till the star going to the west, was near the horizon (heaven's descent) .... The description is more poetic than accurate; for, as Mr. Keightley has pointed out, the evening star 'never *rises* but *appears*.'

32. *rural ditties*, pastoral songs. *ditty*, originally means the words, as distinguished from the music of a song. Cf. *As You Like It*, V, 3, 32-4. "Though there was no great *matter* in the ditty, yet the *note* was very untuneable" [L. *dicere*=say].

33. *tempered to*, in tune with ; attuned to ; originally *temper*=mix together, mingle ; thus *even temper*=a proper mixture of the four humours] cf. *Paradise Lost* VII, 597-8.

the oaten flute, the flutes of shepherds ; according to the tradition, the pipe is made of oat.

32-33. *i.e.* 'meanwhile, pastoral poets were also singing their songs attuned to the pipes of shepherds .... The friends of Milton and King, the young students at Cambridge, also wrote poems ; many of them were incorporated in anthologies (especially Latin) by the University. King contributed to some of them.

34. *satyrs*, according to Greek mythology, they are the servants of Dionysus, and spirits of the wood. They are said to be fond of wine, and of sensual pleasures, and are often

represented as *dancing* with wood-nymphs. They also carry a shepherd's gear—flute, staff, etc.

fauns, gods of fields, according to Roman mythology. They are often represented as half-men and half-goats, with horns ; hence, with *cloven* heel. The *fauns* were identified by the Romans with the *satyrs*, and the satyrs also are spoken of as half-men.

36. *old Damoetas*, i.e. dear Damoetas. Damoetas is a common name in pastoral poetry, and here it must stand for some well-known personality in Cambridge, who liked to listen to the poems of Milton and King. Mr. Masson suggests that 'old Damoetas' is either William Chappell, Milton's first tutor (and later of King's) or Joseph Meade, a well-known Fellow at Cambridge.

25-36. Milton and King were always together, from morning to evening ; some of their friends at the University were enthusiastic poets, while some, less serious (cf. *rough* satyrs . . . . heel) would dance and sing, and listen to the poems of others. Even a great don like Damoetas appreciated their youthful efforts.

37-49. Most touching expression of personel grief.

37-38. Cf. Wordsworth's famous lines—(from a *Lucy* poem)

> 'But she is in her grave, and, oh,
> The difference to me !'

39. *thee . . . . thee.* Notice that the repetition emphasises the pathos.

40. *thyme*, herb with fragrant leaves.

gadding, wandering, straggling ; hence gadding vine= growing everywhere in abundance. [*gad* is of Scandinavian origin, and is used very frequently in the sense of 'go about idly,' 'wander aimlessly,' as in 'to gad about', etc.]

41. *echoes*—personified, cf. *Comus* 230 et seq., and *notes*

42. *copses*, woods of small trees.

44. *fanuing*, i.e. moving like fans ; *lays*, songs (F.).

42-44. The poet believes that the leaves of willows and hazels used to dance with joy when they heard the songs of Lycidas ; no more their 'fanning' now !

45. *canker*, a worm that feeds on blossoms ; thus the cruellest enemy of roses, etc. Titania (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* II, 2, 3) asks some of her fairies 'to kill cankers in the musk rose buds.. *Canker* is really the hardened from of *cancer* (*Latin cancer*.)

46. *taint-worm*, a worm that is harmful to cattle, as the canker is to the rose. Sir Thomas Browne in his *Vulgar Errours* (bk. III, ch. 27) says—"There is found in the summer a kind of spider called a *tainct*, of a red colour, and so little of body that ten of the largest will hardly outweigh a grain ; this by the country-people is accounted a deadly poison unto cows and horses."

weanling, new-weaned, i.e. young.

47. *gay, wardrobe*, here, gay, colourful dresses (ref. to the various colours of the flowers). *wardrobe* properly means a place for keeping robes.

48. *when ... blows*, 'when the hawthorn first flowers'—i.e. in spring.

white-thorn=hawthorn ; *blows*, i.e. blossoms, flowers. Shakespeare refers to the spring in the same manner in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I, 1, 183.

"When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear."

39-49. Milton follows his Greek models in making trees and flowers mourn the death of his friend.

50-64. Milton asks the Nymphs why they could not protect his friend. The appeals to the Nymphs also has its prototype in Theocritus (Id. I) and Virgil (Eclogues X). Shelley imitates Milton in *Adonais*.

50. *Nymphs*, i.e. goddesses of mountains, woods, etc.

remorseless deep, the pitiless (*cruel*) ocean.

51-2. *steep . . . . Druids lie*, ref. to the Welsh mountains. According to Warton, the tombs of the Druids at *Kerig-y-Druidion* in South Denbighshire ; according to Mr.

Keightley, *Penmaenmawr*, between Conway and Bangor. It is difficult, however, to say which spot Milton had in mind.

53. *Druids*, (the 'old bards') were really the priests of the ancient Britons and Gauls. They were also supposed to be soothsayers and 'wise men'. Milton calls them poets.

bards, poets, (especially, Celtic minstrels).

54. *Mona*, the old name for the isle of Anglesey.

the shaggy top, i.e. the mounts in the island, full of trees (*shaggy*).

Mr. Masson points out that the island was a retreat of the Druids' (III, 281).

55. *Deva*, the old name for the river Dee.

wizard stream, ref. to the superstition that the river could give indications for the future of England and Wales by the changes in its course ; it forms the boundary of England and Wales. For the superstition, cf. Drayton's lines (*Polyolbrion*) about 'Holy Dee'

'Who, changing of his fords, by divination had
Foretold the neighbouring folk of fortune good or bad.'

and Milton's *Vacation Exercise*, where he refers to a good many rivers –

'Or coaly Tyne, or ancient *hallowed Dee*.'

56. *fondly*. foolishly ; to no purpose.

56-7. *I fondly ... there*, i.e. *I foolishly* try to imagine what the Nymphs could have done, *if* ...*foolishly*, because the Nymphs could not have been of any help.

58. *Muse .... bore*, Calliope, the mother of Orpheus. She was the Muse of epic poetry.

Orpheus, the famous musician of Greek mythology. His music was listened to even by birds and beasts. His wife, Eurydice died of a snake-bite. Orpheus went down to Hades, and with the help of his heavenly music persuaded Persephone (the goddess of Hades) to release Eurydice. She

released his wife on condition that he must not turn back and see Eurydice till they reached the earth. Orpheus looked back, and his wife vanished for ever. In his grief he insulted the Thracian Mænads, and they tore him to pieces. His head was thrown into the Hebrus, and was carried to the isle of Lesbos where finally it was buried. [A number of poets have referred to this story of Orpheus. Milton mentions it in *Par. Lost* VII, 30-38 : and *L'Allegro* 145-50. The story of Orpheus' death is also told by Virgil and Ovid.]

59. *enchanting*, i.e. possessing magical power ; bewitching, on account of his music, which moved even inanimate things.

60. *whom . . . lament*, true of Lycidas also.

61. *rout*, troop, or band ; (cf. 'rout of monsters' in *Comus*.)

61. *the rout . . . . . . roar*. ref. to the death of Orpheus. The 'rout' consists of the Thracian women, who were engaged in the orgies of Bacchus. Cf. Shakespeare's ref. to the story—(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 48-9).

'The riot of the tipsy Bacchanls,
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage'.

62. *gory visage*, face (head) all covered with blood.

stream, the river Herbus, in Thrace.

63. *Lesbian shore*, coast of Lesbos, an island in the *Ægean* sea.

58-63. To show that even the Nymphs could not have helped Lycidas, Milton draws a full picture of Orpheus' death. Calliope could do nothing for her cruelly-treated son. In *Par Lost*. VII, 37-8, Milton concludes his reference to Orpheus thus—

' . . . Nor could the Muse defend
Her son . . .'

64-84. Milton is suddenly reminded of the slight regard shown by his contemporaries to poets. Lycidas *was* a poet,

and so *is* he ! But what is the use of 'living laborious days' if poetry brings no reward ? Apollo answers : The mist is dispelled, and the poet is again convinced of the great significance of poetry. Though a digression, the passage is of great value as it throws light on the poet's attitude toward poetry and life.

64. *what boots it*, of what use is it ? What is the good of ? (from A.S. *bot*, M.E. *beten* = to amend).

65. *to tend . . . trade*, i.e. to apply oneself to the writing of poetry, which is not honoured by the people.

66. *and . . . Muse*, to work hard for the sake of the Muse (i.e. poetry) that gives nothing in return. *thankless*, giving nothing in return, not even thanks.

67. *as others use*, as others do, are wont to do. *Others*, poets writing lighter verse—men like Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling, etc. known for their love-poetry.

68-9. The Cavalier poets, writing love-lyrics for beautiful ladies, (real and imaginary) may be said to 'sport with Amaryllis . . .'

Amaryllis and Næera are names of women frequently found in pastoral poetry—Greek as well as Latin. Mr. Verity points out that the two names are mentioned together in Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* and in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

That Milton's contemporaries were capable of producing the stuff that Milton parodies here is sufficiently clear even from a single book like the *Hesperides*. Lovelace, in his famous lyric, *To Althea from Prison*, writes

"*When I lie tangle in her hair*
And fettered to her eye . . ."

70. Cf. Spenser (*Tear of the Muses*, 454) 'Due praise, that is the spur of doing well.' *clear spirit*, a noble, pure soul.

70-72. 'Fame (that last weakness of noble souls—) is the incentive that makes pure souls work hard . . . .'

71. *That last infirmity . . of minds*, other moral weaknesses may be overcome by great men but love of fame is the most difficult of all to be overcome. Hence it is called the last infirmity of noble minds.

71-2. these lines give us a glimpse of Milton's own life at the time he wrote the poem. His stay at Horton can very well be described as 'living laborious days.' Milton was preparing for his great epics, and the lines (64-72) beautifully describe the doubts that he must have felt about the rightness of his decision.

73. *guerdon*, reward, recompense.

74. *sudden blaze*, i.e. sudden glory ; *blaze* is often metaphorically used.

75 *the blind .... shears*, ref. to Atropos, one of the Fates, and *not* Furies. Furies were the avengers of crime. Milton is referring to Atropos who cuts short man's life. The three Fates are Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. "Clotho held the distaff, Lachesis drew off the thread, and Atropos cut it short" (O.C.C.L.) ; cf. *Epitaph on Lady Winchester*, 29-30 ; *blind Fury*, relentless Fate (Atropos, with her shears).

73-76. *But the fair .... life*, ".... just when we are about to reap the fruit of our hard toil, and hope to find ouerselves famous, relentless Fate, that cruel Atropos, come with her shears and cuts the flimsy thread of our life".

76. "*But .... praise*" i.e., Fate slits not the praise, i.e. Fate may cut short a man's life, but cannot prevent the praise that is due to him. Fame does not die, it is immortal.

77. *Phoebus*, Apollo, the god of music and poetry.

77. *touched .... ears*, trembling due to excitement : Apollo himself reminds the poet of the greatness of a poet's calling.

78. Fame does not belong to this world.

79. *Nor .... foil* i.e, nor is Fame in the .... foil ; *glistering*, shining with a false lustre ; showy, *foil*, gold or silver leaf in which a gem is set, to increase its lustre.

78-80. 'Fame does not belong to this world; nor is Fame like a precious stone set off to the world in a brilliant gold leaf; nor is Fame mere popularity.' Milton points out that true fame does not lie in advertising one's self to the world, or in deep popularity, *broad rumour*=a frequent, mention of one's name in people's talk etc.

81. *by*, by means of, with the help of. 'The plant of fame lives and spreads by the power or help of the pure eyes ...'

82. *Jave*, i.e. the supreme God.

83. *lastly*, i.e. giving the final decision.

83-4 You may expect only as much fame in Heaven as God—after weighing your deeds allots to you', i.e. let *God* judge our actions : Fame, not approved of by Him, is not true fame.

84. *meed*, reward ; fame that is your due.

84-102. Milton turns once again to the death of Lycidas, and the circumstances in which he died are indirectly suggested. The ocean was responsible for his death ; but in these lines the herald of Neptune exonerates his master. Hippotades speaks on behalf of the winds and assures the poet that *they* were not at fault.

85. *Arethust*, a fountain in the island of Ortygia near Syracuse. Originally a Sicilian nymph and the goddess of *pastoral poetry* (see Virgil, *Eclogues* IV), Arethusa was transformed by Artemis into a fountain when Alpheus pursued her. Milton refers to the pursuit of Arethusa in *Arcades* 30-31—(see also Shelley's *Arethusa*)

> 'Divine Alpheus, who by secret sluice,
> Stole under seas to meet his Arethuse'.

86. *Mincius*, a tributary of the river Po in Italy ; editors note the indebtedness of Milton to Virgil for his descriptive phrases, 'smooth-sliding', and 'crowned with vocal reeds'—(*Georgics* III). Virgil is said to have been born near Mincius.

crown'd .... reeds, i.e. along which grew *vocal* reeds or

pipes ; ref. to the pastoral poets like Virgil, whose name is connected with the river.

85-86. Arethuse and Mincius thus represent Greek and Latin pastoral verse.

87. *that strain*, i.e. the speech of Phœbus, that brings comfort to the poet's mind. Note that the temporary cloud of pessimism has been swept away by Apollo's pronouncement.

mood, style, mode ; tone.

88. *oat*, 'oaten pipe', *i.e.* pastoral verse.

89. *Herald of the sea.* Triton with his conch—the herald of Poseidon (Neptune). See *note* on *Comus* 871.

90. *That . . . . plea*, that came to speak on behalf of Neptune—the god of the sea.

91. *He*, ref. to Triton. *felon*, cruel, wicked.

92. *doomed*, lit. condemend to so cruel a death.

93. *every . . . . wings*, every gust of rough, violent wind.

94. *beaked promontory*, i.e. promontories jutting out like long beaks of birds ; *promontory*,=part of high land projecting into the sea, or air.

96. *Hippotades.* Æolus, son of Hippotes. He is the god of the winds and is said to keep the winds enclosed in a mountain-cavern ; (see *Smith*).

97. *his dungeon*, ref. to the mountain cave in which the winds were imprisoned.

96-7. i.e. Æolus had not allowed any blast of wind to stir out and harm the ship in which King was sailing.

97-102. Milton's account of King's death. There was no storm, the weather was good, and so there was no reason why the ship should sink ; but, adds Milton, the ship itself was unseaworthy—'a fatal and perfidious bark.' Milton's account is different from the account of others ; especially of Henry King, Edward King's brother, according to whom the shipwreck was due to "an unluckie storm".

98. *level brine*, the level or smooth surface of the ocean ; implying that the sea was not rough when the ship sank.

99. *sleek Panope*, the soft-haired sea-nymph Panope. She was a daughter of Nereus.

sleek, may also refer to the fish-like appearance of Panope, for the Nereids were sometimes represented as half-maidens and half-fishes.

99. indicates again that the sea was calm, and the sea-maidens were playing as usual.

her sisters, the Nereids.

100. *fatal and perfidious*, ruinous and treacherous ; not Milton's condemnation of the ship.

101. *Built .... dark*. This line explains why the ship was '*fatal*'. According to superstition, anything done during an eclipse is bound to prove unlucky. Milton mentions this belief in *Par. Lost* I, 597.

rigged .... dark, i.e. the ship was being cursed while it was being rigged. *rig* = to equip a ship with ropes, spars, etc.

103-7. Camus, the god of the river Cam on which Cambridge is situated, is the representative of the University. King's death was mourned by his friends and teachers at Cambridge, and it is quite natural that Camus should represent them all. The selection of Camus as the sole representative of the University ensures brevity and greatly adds to the sad dignity of the situation.

103. *Camus*, god of the Cam ; often introduced in the academic verse of Milton's day. The most notable introduction of Camus in pastoral poetry is in Phineas Fletcher's *Piscatorie Eclogues*.

sire, father, guardianangel. Cf. Macaulay's phrase '*father* Tiber' in *Lays of Ancient Rome*.

footing slow, with slow foot-steps ; the river Cam is said to be a 'slow-flowing' river, and Milton's descriptlon is correct. The slow steps also indicate grief.

104. *mantle*, a loose cloak.

bonnet, a covering for the head, as in the famous passage in the *Merchant of Venice* (I, 2, 80-81)–

'I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his *bonnet* in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere.'

sedge, the plants growing along the river (or lakes, etc); cf. Keats (*Sa Belle Dame Sans Merci*).

'The *sedge* is withered from the lake....'

The bonnet of Camus is made of sledge.

105. *inwrought . . . . dim*, i.e. embroidered with dim (i.e. that cannot be identified) figures. The phrase has been variously explained. According to Keightley, it is 'a mere play of fancy'. Some believe that Milton is referring to the dim indistinct 'streaks' which appear on dry sedgy leaves. According to Mr. Verity, "they (*figures dim*) may have had reference to the history of Cambridge University."

106. *sanguine flower*, i.e. the hyacinth. The flower from the blood of a very beautiful youth called Hyacinthus, killed with a quoit by Zephyrus. On the petals of the flower, according to the story, appeared letters (AI AI) which were at once the initials of Hyacinthus and the Greek exclamation of woe (alas !).

The hyacinth is said to have sprung from the blood of Ajax according to another version of the story.

106. *sanguine*, red like blood (Lat. *sanguis* = blood.)

105-6. 'on the edge of the bonnet these were peculiar mysterious marks, like those on the hyacinth flower, expressing great grief'.

107. *reft*, taken away, carried away by force. (from '*reave*,' A.S. *reafian*).

quoth, —from A.S. *swethan*.

pledge, son, child (fig.).

108-31. A passage very often discussed, as it is full of certain words and phrases that are beautifully vague and un-

certain. It is a strong criticism of the English Church, and entirely inspired by the Puritan fervour of Milton. (See descriptive note added by Milton). Milton's wonderful restraint is seen in every line. Even when he writes on a subject dearest to his heart (viz. *true* religion, as distingushed from *false*) he keeps the signified tone, and expresses his views through St. Peter. Though often referred to as a 'digression', the passage appears to have a close connection with the poem, if we remember that in the death of Lycidas, the church (like the University) had lost a servant the like of whom could hardly be seen again.

For a very interesting analysis of some lines from this passage, see Ruskin's '*Sesame and Lilies*'.

108. *Last . . . . go*, because St. Peter is the most distinguished among the mourners.

109. *The pilot . . . . lake,* St. Peter, 'the rock' on which the Church is built.

Galilean lake, the Sea of Galilee. Milton's phrase 'the Pilot . . . . lake' is not from the Gospels. Peter, however, is mentioned as a fisherman, and this seems to explain Milton's 'Pilot'. (See *St. Luke* V.)

110. *Two massy . . . . twain*, i.e. St. Peter had in his hand two keys—one of gold, and the other of iron. Cf, *St. Matthew* 16, XVIII-XIX.

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...."

Later tradition has restricted the number of 'keys' to two ; 'gold' and 'iron' are Milton's contribution. Dante also mentions two keys that open the gate of heaven : (*Purgatorio* IX). According to Ruskin, Milton's idea is superior to Dante's. For, "Milton makes one, of gold, the key of heaven ; the other, of iron, the key of the prison, in which the wicked teachers are to be bouud who 'have taken away the key of knowledge, yet entered not in themselves'".

111. *amain*, with force (*a+maegen*) A.S., *maegen*= strength cf. 'might and main'.

110-11 cf. *Comus* 13-14.

112. *mitred*, i.e. covered with a mitre, a tall cap worn by bishops ; St. Peter, therefore, appears in the dress of a bishop. cf Ruskin—"Milton was no Bishop-lover ; how comes St. Peter to be mitred? .... though not a lover of false bishops, he *was* a lover of true ones ; and the Lake-pilot is here, in his thoughts, the type and head of true episcopal power."

stern, sternly.

113-31. The criticism of the clergy begins. Milton's views on religion are spread almost all over his prose. His attack is here chiefly directed against the church of England but it is quite plain that an austere Puritan like him would condemn *all* corrupt clergy.

113-5. St. Peter means that King should have been spared for the services of the Church ; his place in the 'fatal bark' should really have gone to a number of mercenary priests.

enow of such, i.e. 'enough' or "good many of such (unworthy priests ; l. 114-5).

114-15. *such as .... fold*, i.e. persons who join the Church, merely for the sake of a livelihood, in three different ways. Some '*creep*', *i.e.* enter the fold cunningly, like thieves ; some '*interude*', i.e. thrust themselves on the church forcibly, because of their boldness and impudence ; some '*climb*' i.e. because of selfish motives they work hard and rise to high positions.

Cf. *St. John* X ; especially 1-2.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep".

116. *Of other . . . . make*, they pay no heed to anything else except. . . .

117-8. " . . . . to fight for places at the shearing feat and push aside with discourtesy, even the worthy guests invited for it. . . ." i.e. the mercenary priests are bent only on getting money, and in their scramble for it, they set aside with impudence even the claims of the pious, worthy, etc.

shearer's feast, i.e. feast held after shearing, after the year's work is over. For a very beautiful description of a shearing feast see *The Winter's Tale* IV, 4 ; also Spenser's *Astrophels* 32,

shove away, to push aside, etc.

the worthy . . . . guest, read *St. Matthew* 22, I-X especially VIII—

"Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy."

119. *Blind mouths* i.e. priests who have not knewledge and are interested only in eating and drinking. Ruskin has given a thorough analysis of the phrase: cf.

> "A Bishop means a person who sees. A pastor' means one who feeds.

The most unbishoply character a man can have is therefore to be blind.

The most unpastoral is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed,—to be a mouth : Put the two words together, and you have "blind mouths. . . ."

[Note that *Bishop* is derived from Gk. *episcopos*=overseer. *Pastor* from L. *pasco*, feed.]

119-21. ". . . . that hardly know how to hold a sheephook, and are ignorant even of the least thing connected with the shepherd's art." Milton is condemning priests who have no learning, and who do not understand even the smallest part of their duty. *Sheephook* is a pole with a hook that a shepherd carries (for catching a straying sheep, etc.) It refers, in the case of Bishop, to his staff ; *the faithful herdsman* i.e. a conscientious pastor, a good shepherd.

Milton and his friends had very high opinion about Edward King's scholarship. - Mr. Verity quotes lines from other contributors to the Cambridge volume.

122. *What ... them*, what do they care ? Impersonal use of *reck* (A, S. *recan*) cf. *Comus* 403.

They are sped, they have achieved enough for themselves ; they have prospered well—from A.S. *spedan*, to prosper ; M. E. to fare.)

123. *list*, choose, wish.

lean, weak, without any substance.

flashy, insipid, tasteless. (O.E.D.) cf. Bacon on *Studies*. 'Distilled books are like common distilled waters *flashy* things'.

124. *scrannel* (arch.) grating, squeaky (O.E.D.) supposed to be of Scandinavian origin ; (cf. nor. *Scran*=lean) used in dialects especially in the Lancashire dialect.

122-4. "Why should they care ? They need not. They have enough (worldly prosperity) for themselves. And they sing squeaking, worthless pipes, their insipid, immaterial songs whenever it pleases them." The 'songs' are the sermons, preached by these worthless priests : they occasionally address their flocks in a harsh, uninviting manner and their sermons contain nothing of significance. Note that Milton's contempt for these 'shepherds' is seen in every word—'lean, 'flashy', 'grate', 'scranned', 'wretched straw'.

125. *The hungry sheep*, i.e. people who want spiritual guidance, spiritual nourishment.

126. *rank mist*, for foul mist, harmful if inhaled ; 'the fog of the fen' (Ruskin) ; ref. to false, pernicious doctrines.

127. *Rot inwardly . . . . spread*, sheep, not getting food and inhaling foul air rot inside, and spread their contagious disease. Some believe that Milton has sheep-rot in mind.

125-7. ". . . . . persons in need of spiritual food are not fed : they are made to sustain themselves with false, pernicious doctrines (or unworthy priests), and thus they are re-

sponsible for spreading ignorance that ruins all." Cf. Ruskin's comment—

"The breath of God is health, and life, and peace to them (i.e. men), as the air of heaven is to the flocks on the hills ; but man's breath is disease and contagion to them, as the fog of the fen" ; and also, II, *St. Peter* 2, I-II.

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies . . . .

"And many shall follow their pernicious ways ; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of".

128. *grim wolf*, the Roman Catholic Church :—i.e. its representatives in England who were carrying on secret propaganda. Milton is referring to the conversion of the Protestants—due to the organised efforts of Roman Catholics. [Warton, and following him, some others believe that the "grim wolf" was Archbishop Laud who was fast becoming unpopular on account of his anti-Puritan views and actions].

with privy paw, i.e. with a secret, undetected paw : ref. to secret organisations of the Roman Catholics.

129. *daily devours*, ref. to frequent conversions of Protestants (and Puritans) to the Roman Church.

and nothing said, i.e. 'this proselytism passes unnoticed and uncondemned by the true clergy.'

128-9. In addition to all this the Roman Catholic Church is fast carrying on its dangerous but secret propaganda, and daily claims new converts. None utters even a word of protest and warning. Milton naturally denounces the Catholics who were undermining the strength of the Puritans.

130-31. It is in these lines that Milton "foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then at the height of their power." The general sense of the lines is quite clear : there is some very powerful agency (called '*the two-handed engine*') that will give a very rude and severe shock to the fool's paradise in which the corrupted clergy chose to dwell. Even one blow of the two-handed engine is enough to bring them

to their senses—perhaps, to ruin them for ever : no second blow will be needed.

the two-handed engine, an 'engine' or instrument (a machine) managed with both hands.

Several interpretations of this phrase have been suggested. The best way seems to be not to emphasise too much the word 'engine.' Editors try to identify it either with 'a sword' or 'an axe' mentioned in the Gospels. Probably, the use of the word is due to the strong words used in the previous lines—'grim wolf,' though a common phrase, suggesting great danger.

Can we explain the phrase as a reference to the '*Last Judgment*' which can smite only once ? The 'engine' is '*two-handed*' because the 'Last Judgment' will send 'those on the right hand' to 'life eternal' and those 'on the left hand' to 'everlasting punishment.' *St. Matthew* 25 ; especially, XXXIII :

"And he shall set the sheep on his *right* hand, but the goats on the *left*" ; and also II *Peter* 2, IX—"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." Some other explanations are—(a) according to Mr. Tillyard (*Milton*, Appendix F.) the 'two-handed engine' is probably "the iron sceptre or rod of Christ's anger : 'two-handed' for nothing further than its size and weight.' In support of his view Mr. Tillyard quotes a passage from Milton's *Reformation in England* (Bohn, ii, 412), and *Psalms* II, 7-9.

(b) Milton has in mind the 'axe' mentioned in *St. Matthew* 3, X. Cf. "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees."

(c) It is a ref. to *Revelation* 2, XVI ; cf. "And he had in his right hand seven stars ; and out of his mouth went a sharp *two-edged* sword."

(d) lastly, there is a more matter-of-fact explanation, suggested by Mr. Masson, though he himself is afraid that it is "too prosaic." The phrase may be a reference to the English Parliament with its two Houses ; many Puritans

believed that the Parliament could put a check to a good deal of corruption.

130. *at the door*, i.e. very near, waiting to strike, etc. Cf. *St. Matthew* 24, XXXIII.

132-51. The poet feels the strain of his religious zeal and seeks the aid once again of the pastoral Muse. Now begins a passage in a lighter strain—chiefly descriptive ; it closes with the collection of flowers for the hearse of Lycidas.

132. *Alpheus*, the lover of the nymph Arethusa ; see note on l. 85. Both here represent the pastoral Muse.

the dread voice, i.e. of St. Peter, II. 113-131.

133. *that....streams*, i.e. that temporarily checked the course of his pastoral verse.

Sicilian Muse, ref. to the pastoral verse of Sicily i.e. of the poet Theocritus, the famous writer of *Idylls*.

134. *vales*, valleys, *hither* i.e. on the hearse 'where Lycid lies.'

135. *bells*, the bell-shaped inner parts of flowers—cf. "In a cowslip's *bell* I lie"—*Tempest* V, 89.

136. *use*, haunt, visit frequently.

mild whispers, ref. to the rustling of leaves of trees in the 'shades.'

137. *wanton*, unrestrained in movement. Shakespeare uses 'wanton' with winds. cf. 'wanton air' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, 3, 104) ; from *wan*, un ; and *towen*, trained.

138. *swart star*, star Sirius, also called the Dog-Star, the chief star in *Canis Major*. *Dog-days* (i.e. the hot season) get the name from the Dog-Star, which signifies enormous heat.

swart, swarthy dark.

sparely, rarely, as the valleys are very deep.

looks, i.e. exercises influence on ; the stars look with different aspects, and thus exercise good or bad influence on everything.

138. i.e. "(deep valleys) whose surface is very rarely visited by the rays of the dark Sirius and (hence) are fresh with vegetation...." The swart star causes heat, and hence is harmful to flowers etc : the valleys are free from its influence.

139. *quaint*, graceful, beautiful ; cf. *Arcades* 46-7.

"And curl the grove
With ringlets quaint."

enamelled, shining, bright like enamel-work. Milton uses the word frequently—cf. *Par. Lost* IX, 525 'sleek enamelled neck'; *Par. Lost* IV, 149 ; *Arcades* 84. 'The smooth enamelled green', etc.

eyes i.e. the flowers of different colours. [It may incidentally be noted that *daisy*=day's eye].

141. *purple* make purple, impurple make bright. Purple denotes only brightness, or brilliance, (cf. *Par, Lost*. III, 364) ; not necessarily the hue.

142-50. "This is the most exquisite flower-and-colour passage in all Milton's poetry. His manuscript shows that he brought it to perfection by additions and afterthoughts." Masson, (III, 285). Many such 'flower-passages' are found in English poetry : the best of them is Perdita's description of some flowers beginning with

'O proserpina
For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon . . . . ". (*The Winter's Tale* IV, 4, 116-27) ;

Also cf. the very long passage in Ben Jonson's masque *Pau's Anniversary* ; and Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, *April*, which may have suggested to Milton the present passage—

"Bring hither the pink and purple cullambine
With gelli flowers ;
Bring coronations, and sops in wine,
Worn of paramoures . . . . ."

It is well-known that Milton was not a very careful observer of nature ; this passage, bringing together flowers of different seasons, proves once again that he did not try to secure accuracy in his description. This need not detract from the beauty of the passage, which attracts us more by its colour and music, than in its scientific accuracy. It must be granted, however, that a first hand observation of nature could have made the passage much more beautiful. As Mark Pattison finely observes, "Milton is not a man of the fields, but of book . . . . ." (*Milton*, p. 26).

142. *rathe*, early ; the primrose is one of earliest to bloom ; A. S. *hradth*=quick).

forsaken, i.e. alone, unnoticed by the pepole. Cf. *The Winter's Tale*, IV, 4, 122.

> "pale primroses,
> That die unmarried, ere they can behold
> Bright Phœbus in his strength."

143. *crow-toe*, a kind of flower.

pale, i.e. white, pale-yellow.

144. *pink*, the flower called 'pink'; see note on *Comus*, l. 850.

ponsy, a flower like the violet. Fr. *prensee*=thought ; cf. There is pansies, that's for thoughts", *Hamlet*, IV, 5, 178.

freaked with jet, with jet-black spots.

146. *the well-attired woodbine*, i.e. the well-dressed honeysuckle ; ref. to the colour (yellow) of the flowers.

147. *cowslip*, a yellow flower ; cf. *wan* i.e. pale.

that . . . . head, that have drooping heads.

pensive, thoughtful.

148. *And . . . . wears*, i.e. every flower with sober hues ; flowers not gaudy.

sad, sober (fit for being strewn on a hearse).

149. *amaranthus*, an imaginary flower, that never fades ; cf. *Par. Lost* III, 352-60 :

"....... but soon for man's offence
To Heaven removed where first it grew, there grows,
And flowers aloft shading the fount of life ...."

150. *daffadillies*,=daffodils.

151. *laureate hearse*, i.e. hearse decked or honoured with laurel ; implying that King's death should be mourned as the death of a great 'shepherd' (poet).

hearse, usually the carriage for conveying coffin : *here* it may mean the wooden platform on which the coffin is supposed to be placed.

152-64. Milton recollects that his fancy has taken him far from all sense of reality, for Lycidas, drowned in the vast ocean, can have no hearse and flowers. In these lines, therefore, he refers to the way in which the dead body of his friend might be wafted on the waves from shore to shore.

151-3. *For so .... surmise*, "Let our weak and timid thoughts play with false beliefs and guesses, if only to derive a little consolation"; i.e. 'in order to forget the stern reality, let us indulge in a little, harmless dream which gives us some comfort.' The poet is referring to the desire he has expressed of strewing Lycidas's hearse with flowers, etc.

frail, weak, perhaps timid, afraid of reality.

dally, trifle, play.

154-5. *whilst ... away*, i.e. 'while thy body is being hurled from coast to coast, and from sea to sea ....'

156. *stormy Hebrides*, the Western Islands, north-west of Scotland ; the coast has to face Atlantic ocean ; hence *stormy*.

157. *whelming*, overwhelming, overpowering.

158. *monstrous world*, the world of monsters i.e. the ocean ; cf. *Comus*, 532.

159. *moist vows*, i.e. the obsequies, moist with the tears of his friends.

to our . . . denied, 'not allowed by cruel fate to receive obsequies at the hands of his weeping friends . . .'

160. *by the . . . old*, i.e. near the abode of Bellerus, famous in Fables; 'Bellerus' is said to be derived by Milton from *Bellerium*, the Roman name for Land's End in Cornwall. *Bellerus* is, therefore, the name of some great Cornish chief. Milton had first written '*Corineus*'—the old ruler of Cornwall, and a giant-killer. He lived in the days of *Brutus*, (see note on *Comus*, 827.

161. *the great Vision*, i.e. of the great Archangel Michael.

the guarded mount, guarded or protected by the presence of the angel; St. Michael's Mount near Land's End; '*guarded*' refers to an old Norman fortress on the mount. There is said to be a particular seat on the Mount (known as St. Michael's chair) where the Archangel is occasionally seen. Cf. Spenser (*Shepherd's Cal. Julye* 41-2).

"St. Michael's Mount who does not know,

That wards the Western coast?"

162. *Namancos*, a district in Gallicia (Northern Spain) and near to Land's End. Mr. Verity, in an excellent note on *Namancos* points out that Milton must have found this name and *Bayona* in the map of *Gallicia* in the 1636 edition of the *Mercator's Atlas*. Milton wanted names of places 'toward' which St. Michæl could 'look' from his seat: and he selected, therefore, the Northern parts of Spain.

Bayona, a town in Gallicia, south of *Namancos*; it is known for its fortress, and hence Milton's phrase *Bayona's hald* (castle).

160-62. "(whether) you (i.e. Lycidas) lie near the famous Bellerus of old, near Land's End; near which the great Archangel Michael sits and looks across the seas at Namancos and the castle of Bayona . . . ."

Vision, i.e. of the Archangel.

163. *Angel*, Archangel Michael: he has been looking at Spain for a long time, and hence, 'look homeward (at the

coast of England), and melt with pity at the sad sight—the dead body of Lycidas tossing on the waves'.

152-63. That faulty construction of this passage has been often commented upon. Milton introduces too many subordinate clauses (beginning with *whilst*, *whether*, *where*, *whether*,) and fails to complete the main sentence. Towards the close of the passage, Milton's attention is distracted by the splendid Vision of St. Michael, and he addresses (in 1. 163) the Saint instead of Lycidas. All the *thees* and *thous*, therefore, of earlier lines are left as they were.

164. *dolphins*, aquatic mammals, believed to be friends of men. There is also a classical legend about the help that dolphin gives to men. *Arion*, a famous musician and poet; he was thrown into sea by sailors who wanted his wealth. But his music charmed a *dolphin*, and it took him safe to land.

According to Burton (*Anatomy of Melancholy*), the dolphin is much affected by music.

waft, carry; cf. wave.

hapless, unlucky.

165-85. Milton now introduces a note of consolation. His deeply religious soul refuses to believe that death can be the end of everything. No, Lycidas is *not* dead; like the sun, he may shine again, with greater glory. He has gone to a place much happier than our earth. Cf. the close of Epitaphium Damonis, ll. 198-219.

167. *the watery floor*, i.e. the surface of the ocean.

168. *the day-star*, the sun. cf. *Par. Lost*, V, 1069-70.

. . . : . .ere this *diurnal star*

Leave cold the night . . . ."

[According to some editors, however, the poet may have in mind Lucifer, the morning star.]

169. *repairs*, renews; sets right again etc.

170. *tricks*, decks, adorns : cf. *Il Penseroso*, 122-3.

"Till civil-suited morn appear,

Not *trick'd* and frounced as she was wont."

new-spangled, with added brilliance. *spang* or *spangle* refers to a shining ornament—of gold, etc. cf. *The Faerie Queene* IV, 2, 45, and Milton's *Nativity Ode*, 21.

"And all the *spangled* host keep watch...."

are, used here for 'gold', as in *Hamlet* IV, 1, 257

'O'er whom his very madness, like some *ore*

Among a mineral of metals base,

Shows itself pure......"

171. *flames*, shines.

168-71. "Thus does the sun go into the ocean (every night) ; but soon he sets right his drooping head, adorns his rays, and with the lustre of gold, shines once again in the expanse of the morning sky...." The poet obviously refers to the phenomena of sunset and sunrise : the sun appears to sink into the ocean at night, but with the morning he is again in the sky. Similarly, the disappearance of Lycidas is only temporary....

172. So *Lycidas....high*, i.e. Lycidas, like the sun, sank into the sea, only to reach the heights of heaven.

173. *Through....waves*, i.e. with the help he could receive from Christ, For Christ's walking on the waves see *St. Matthew* 14, especially XXIV.

"And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went into them, walking on the sea,"

St. Peter also walked on the sea ; cf. XXIX.

"And he said, come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."

174-5. "where (in Heaven) he washes his wet hair with pure nectar, along other (i.e, not to be found in *this* world) groves and other streams...."

For the use of *other* cf. *Comus,* 611.

oozy, wet or wet with mud (ooze) ; Lycidas has to wash his locks as they have become dirty with mud from the sea.

176. *unexpressive*, used by Milton in the sense of "inexpressible"—that cannot be described in words. For this use of *unepxressive* cf. Nativity Ode, 116.

"With unexpressive notes to Heaven's new-born Heir" and As You Like It III, 2, 10—

"The fair, chaste, the unexpressive she...."

nuptial song, ref. so 'the marriage of the Lamp mentioned in the Bible. See *Rev.* 19, VI et seq.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." This marriage is usually interpreted as a representation of the "ideal relationship between God and His people" (see *Peake's Commentary*). The wife is the New Jerusalem, the church of Christ.

178-81. "The saints entertain Lycidas in heaven—the saints who sing in solemn processions...."

181. *And wipe....eyes*, cf *Isaiah* 25, VIII—

"And the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces..." and *Revelation* 21, IV—

'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away. Also, *Rev*. 7, XVII.

"For the Lamp which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Milton makes the saints wipe the tears of Lycidas, though in the Scriptures, God Himself helps the blessed.

183. *Henceforth....shore*, i.e. 'henceforth you will be the guardian spirit of the shore.' That men and places are in the charge of a *Genius*, is a classical belief. Milton

suddenly introduces a classical belief immediately after Christian sentiments (cf. 172-181). Cf. Arnold's *The Scholar-Gipsy*. 149.

184. *in the....recompense*, as a reward or compensation, justly won.

184-5. Milton believes that Lycidas will be the guardian-deity of the shore, and will be always ready to save all persons wandering on the dangerous ocean. He is made the genius of the shore as a reward for his early tribulations.

186-193. This paragraph forms an Epilogue to the 'Monody.' Milton forgets his pastoral machinery and speaks in his own person about what the 'swain' (i.e. the poet himself) has said so far. The poem has already ended on a note of perfect calm, and Milton is free to add a word about himself.

186. *uncouth*, 'unpolished', rude ; *uncouth* lit. means 'unknown' (from un p.p. of *Cunnan*).

187. *sandals grey*, ref. to the grey sky ; the poet was singing, while the Morning with grey colours was walking slow: cf. *Par. Reg.* IV, 426-7—

> "Thus passed the night so foul, till Morning fair
> Came forth with pilgrim steps, in amice gray...."

188. *stops*, small holes, as of a flute.

188. *various quills*, of different pipes. Some believe that Milton, by mentioning 'various quills', admits that the Elegy has not been in one strain ; that he has changed his 'instrument' very often, and thus has introduced some digressions in it. Mr. Jerram even suggests that "this almost amounts to a recognition on the part of the poet of the irregularities of style, the mixture of different and even opposing themes, which some have censured as a defect."

quills, pipes, made of reed,

189. *Doric lay*, Doric song ; here it means "a song after the manner of the Doric poets." The chief composers of the pastoral in Greek (viz. Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus) wrote in the Doric dialect. Hence, *Doric song* = pastoral song.

190. *And....hills*, i.e. the hills appeared stretched on account of their long shadows. This indicates that the sun was gradually setting, and the shadows of hills becoming longer and longer.

191. *And....bay*, 'and soon sank into the western sea.'

192. *he*, i.e. the swain, the poet.

twitched, pulled ; shook this (mantle suggesting that he is ready to leave the place).

mantle blue, both blue and grey are mentioned in pastoral poetry as colours of a shepherd's dress. cf. *Shepherd's Calendar*, *November*, 97-98.

193. Mr. Masson quotes from Peineas Fletcher's *Purple Island* VI, 78—

'To-morrow shall ye feast in pastures new.'

The poet expresses his decision to visit 'new woods' and 'new pastures.' The line is very often interpreted as an allusion to the poet's tour in Italy, which he might have planned before he wrote this elegy. An 'accomplished scholar' (quoted by Mr. Verity) suggests that the shepherd decides to go to 'fresh woods' because "he cannot bear to feed his sheep there alone." The poet is overwhelmed with grief, and wants to leave a place which is full of sad associations.

Can we read in these lines Milton's decision not to write such short poems, such 'pastorals' and 'masques', but to attempt something grander—something 'unattempted yet in prose or rhyme'?—The poet could not immediately carry out his plan : a good many years—though, curiously enough, very few *poems*—intervened between *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*.

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